

# IRISH WRITING

THE MAGAZINE OF  
CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE



Edited by  
**DAVID MARCUS**  
and  
**TERENCE SMITH**

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# IRISH WRITING


THE HISTORY OF

THE IRISH PEOPLE

EDITED BY  
DAVID MCELROY  
AND  
TERENCE SMITH

*First published 1946*

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The editors of IRISH WRITING would welcome contributions from Irish writers all over the world and are especially interested in new writers of Irish birth or descent.



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## FOREWORD

●

IF, as Yeats sang, "Our mother Eire is always young," it is to her literature that we turn to-day for evidence of the quickened pulse. For there, in her writing—in its manner that is, she is still the rebel, still untamed after more than twenty years of self-government; no steady matron but a young girl too full of "notions" to be quiet at home, half a gypsy as she goes her way, with a posy of wildness, to the world. And it is to the world as an active influence in creative literature, that Ireland gives of her great bounty.

In drama she has given spectacle to the lives of the poor. Here is a theatre where peasants, slum dwellers and "jolly beggars" live as intensely as Elizabethan lords and ladies—with the same frank joy in naked feeling and heady speech. Irish fiction celebrates the marriage of fact and imagination; each enlarged, tormented, and forever drawn by the other. Hence the tension of what in other hands has oft-times proved a more urbane, if not pedestrian art.

Is it not evident that in Irish writing we are never far from poetry? Our poets are many. At the moment, perhaps, they are sulking a little or overcome by the shadow of Ben Bulbin. But this is an *ombrage* which at least they share with most of the poets of the English-speaking world. And signs there are that other talents, young and vigorous, are advancing into the sunlight.

But Irish writing is a great deal more than writing *done* in Ireland. It is highly indicative of the world-trend already spoken of that many of our writers live abroad either for long intervals or in voluntary exile. In doing so they may well have missed something of the scent or savour of their native land. Nevertheless, to "live out" is not for an artist one of the Seven Deadly Sins. One has only to remember the great ages of artistic achievement to become aware of the migrations on which they spread. Greek art, Italian craftsmanship:

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these and other movements, while remaining true to their own tradition—indeed through doing so—found a home in any corner of the civilized world. Joyce in Paris retained as much of his native sap as Leonardo in Cloux or Turgeniev in Baden.

Thus in this first issue of IRISH WRITING we have gathered together new work by authors who live not only in Ireland but also in Britain and the United States. In future issues we will include non-Irish guest writers because we believe our literature is strong enough to stand comparisons and lively enough to profit by them. But in making this first collection we have not attempted to impose a synthesis that must needs be false. Our concern lies entirely with what is vital in Irish letters, and this we hope to give—may our symbol be the cornucopia!—in all its abounding variety. Between the many there *is* a link, an Irish kinship. We leave it to our readers to discern the family face.

DAVID MARCUS.

TERENCE SMITH.

# SEAN O'FAOLAIN

## Vive la France !

It took Alec Forbes nearly twenty years to notice that his pals began to wink at one another whenever he began to talk about his travels. That was why he folded into his beard all the lovely words that started to burst inside him when he heard the French rugby team was coming to Cork—such as Le Havre, Ostende, Marseille, café-au-lait, cognac, monsieur, mam'selle, and à la bonne chance. Instead he let the clodhoppers around him blether away to their hearts' content, while he winked into his glass.

But he made it his business to be at the railway station the night the team arrived. He knew there would be an address of welcome from the Mayor and the aldermen and the Chamber of Commerce, and he knew that if there wasn't somebody present who knew the ropes they would make an unholy mess of the whole thing. He wore his best bowler hat, his best cravat, cuffs and butterfly collar, and his gold links that gleamed in the arclights. He had brushed and combed his mosaic beard a dozen times. He held his walking stick up on his shoulder like a gun. The reception committee scowled at him.

Sure enough, when the train roared in and the team hung out of the windows waving tricolours through the steam, Alec began to run up and down the platform and wave his stick and shout 'Vive la France'; and when the team fell out of the carriages like bags of apples he was right in the middle of them handshaking all round and shouting, 'Vive la France, qu'est que vous dee dong, millo quattro chinko quaranto, Cognac! Cognac!'—at which they all cheered and laughed and shook his hands and kissed one another and shouted 'Vive l'Irlande,' and 'Cognac! Cognac! Cognac!'



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'Gintlemin,' said the Mayor shouldering Alec to one side, to read his Address of Welcome.

'Messieurs, mesdames,' corrected Alec out of the side of his mouth. His face was glowing with happiness, his hat back on his poll, his stick on his shoulder like a gun.

'Gintlemin,' said the Mayor sternly. 'I have . . .'

'Blasht yeh,' says Alec, giving him a poke in the back, 'can't yeh say messieurs?' And to cover up he shouted 'Vive la France,' and they all shouted 'Vive l'Irlande'.

'Gintlemin,' cried the Mayor, 'I have the greatest honour. . .'

'Yerrah, for God's sake!' cried Alec. 'Listen to me, boys!' he shouted at the team, and waved his stick like a serpent and enveloped them with his arms, his voice, his beard. 'Come on and have a drink at the Railway Arms. Follow me every man Jack of ye. Comme ci, comme ca? Drinko? Oui, oui?'

'Gintlemin,' bellowed the Mayor, glancing around wildly, 'I have the greatest honour to say to ye to-night. . .'

But Alec had managed to detach four of the team's followers and although three of them came back to hear out the Address of Welcome he succeeded in hauling one young fellow away with him, down the ramp and out of the station, gesticulating so passionately as he pointed onwards that the young man stopped resisting and decided with a shrug that his benevolent-looking guide was probably the town-pimp.

In the Railway Arms, across the tramlines, Alec said 'Cognac?' and the young man said 'Cognac.' They had to be satisfied with Irish whiskey. Alec said, 'Vive la France?' and the young man said 'Vive la France.' Alec said 'Toujours la politesse.' The young man, already a little bored, agreed philosophically, 'Toujours la politesse.' A deep silence followed. Alec drummed the Marseillaise with his fingers on the counter but he didn't feel equal to singing it. After a while the young man said 'Cognac?' so they had some more Irish whiskey.

'You from Marseille?' asked Alec, shaping a whole continent with his hands and stabbing southward at the spittoon.

'Marseille?' asked the young man.

'Oui? Vous? Non? Oui? Yes? No?'

'Comprends pas.'

'Look,' said Alec.

He laid his bowler-hat on the marble counter. He stooped over it and like a magician he moulded fantastic air about it with his fingers.

'La France. Comprenez vous?'

'La France,' agreed the young man, picking a dead fly from the rim of the hat.

'Bong,' said Alec. 'Now watch.'

He laid his walking-stick in front of the hat. Swiftly he spread his hands along the stick, east-west, as if he were drawing it out like a telescope.

'La Mediterranean Sea,' he cried, and gazed hopefully into the eyes of his guest, who at once picked up the stick and returned it with a smile and a bow.

'Votre baton.'

Alec put back the stick a little irritably. Once more he embraced the hat. The barmaid was now watching them both suspiciously. Once more he leaned towards the youth. Once again he indicated the hat.

'La France!' he cried. 'Your country. Comprends?'

The young man sighed as who should say 'Do we have to do this all over again?' However, he nodded to indicate that he was prepared to agree, for the sake of argument, that this peculiar hat was France.

'Bong!' cried Alec.

Once more he laid out the stick. He placed his two palms in the middle of it. He stared fiercely at the youth. He extended his palms slowly and magnificently along the stick and gazing wrapt into the young man's eyes he intoned—

'La Mediterranean Sea!'

At this the youth began to examine Alec's countenance all over, very seriously and minutely. Finding no explanation there he looked at the barmaid who gazed at him with a half-witted expression. At this the young man looked pensively out the door as if contemplating immediate flight.

'No comprends?' implored Alec. 'Look!' he roared. 'La Mediterranee! The Meditabloodywellranian Sea!'

'Vive l'Irlande,' said the young man and raised his glass.

Alec looked coldly at his guest. He tipped his beard. He put on his hat.



'Cognac?' He said listlessly.

'Cognac,' the young man agreed so they had some more Irish whiskey.

Now and again Alec stirred as if to speak but sank back each time frustrated. Then he gave the youth a slap on the back that nearly knocked him over the counter.

'Well, honest to God,' he assured the barmaid, 'I'm a proper ould gom and there's no harm to say it. The poor noddle,' he explained to his friend, 'is gone to hell. Off the rocker altogether. Listen! Sure I have two daughters at home that's learning French for the last three years until you think 'twould come out through their eyes. Look, boy, you come along with me. And anyway, what you want inside your belly band is a good bit of hot grub. That stuff you're drinking there is no damn good to you. Bilge-water! I have deux daughters. Two! Two filles!'

He held up two fingers. The young man demurred. He held up one finger.

'Two!' insisted Alec, 'Blast it, don't I know meself how many daughters I have!'

One finger. Two fingers. One. Two.

Alec led him aside. He ate aerial food. He carved it. He devoured his moustaches. He rubbed his stomach. He waved his hands. The young man gave it up. Alec marched him off arm in arm.

They boarded a little rattlebox of a tram in which they swayed and rocked away from the city's lights, between crumbling Georgian terraces, into the dusk. The yellow glow of the tram fell on the blue evening haze. Now and again it touched another yellow stream falling from the door of some little shop, and whenever that happened the young Frenchman would look back at the bright window and glance at Alec, talking fifteen to the dozen, and give a little sigh. They passed tiny terraces where only the fanlights were bright—the sort of houses where a sea-captain might live. High on the hills above were the lighted windows of big houses, and above these were the first stars which were not quite so bright.

'That's Montenotte,' said Alec, seeing his upward glance.

'Le Mont de Nuit? C'est charmant.'

'All the nobs of Cork live up there. That's if you want to call 'em nobs. I wouldn't. Johnny-jump-ups I call 'em. Thick in the head and strong in the back. In from the heath. If you take my advice you'll steer clear of them blokes while you're here. A lot of bloody yahoos—never went nowhere—never saw nothing. That's their ticket.'

The river opened before them, wide and sullen. Across this sullen water a noble avenue led its long linden line down and down to a darkening loch where a river-light winked fitfully. A steamer was chugging outward on the high tide, trailing its red and green mastlights through the stars. Alec waved his stick across the river at the dusky avenue.

'That's the Marina. The next village down there is Tivoli.'

'La Marina? Tivoli? Mont de Nuit?' cried the youth.

'Mais ce n'est pas l'Irlande. C'est l'Italie!'

The tram disgorged them. They leaned on the quaywall and looked after the diminishing steamer. From here the rumble of the city was faint and its maze of lights were as yellow as wine or candlelight. They suggested friendship, warmth, company. The young foreigner looked at these suggestive lights, looked at the feathery avenue over the river, looked at the little ship which was by now silent in the distance.

Alec suddenly threw one arm around his shoulder.

'Look, monsieur! I want to tell you something. Me Sailor. I've been all over the world. Do you know what my address for forty years was? I'll tell yeh. "Alec Forbes, First Mate, Malta, Gibraltar, Port Said or elsewhere." That's me. Moi. Toujours. Everywhere. Marseille, Ostende, Le Havre, Genoa, up the Black Sea, down the Black Sea, Constanzia, Constantinople, Leghorn, every bloody place. But them blokes,' arm up to the dark hills. 'Never saw nothing. Know nothing. Comprends? Ici? Toujours, ici!'

'Vous?' said the young man miserably.

'No, God blast it! •Them! All of 'em! Every man Jack of 'em! Little Jackeens that never went farther than th'Isle o' Man for two weeks in the Summer. Fellows that wouldn't know the difference between vin blank and vin rooge. They wouldn't even know how to ask for cognac! And they don't believe wan word that I tell 'em. Oh,' he groaned, 'will I ever forget the first time I drank cognac? Forty. . . what am

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I talking about . . . 'tis forty-three years ago. In a place called Angers. Up the Rhône. Comprends? Were you ever there?'

'Angers? Mais oui. La Loire. Une petite ville ravissante.'

'The café was called *Le Roi René*. I remember it as well as. . . And no wan believes me! Not even me own daughters believe me!'

The young man gazed at the yellow lights of the city and sighed deeply.

'Café,' he whispered. '*Le Roi René*. Je m'en souviens. Je veux dire *Le Roi René*,' he explained. '*Pas le café. Le duc d'Anjou. Sa fille, je crois, est devenue reine d'Angleterre.*'

He looked gloomily into the water at the upturned belly of a drowned dog. He looked dejectedly at the stars. He looked at the pin-point of the lighthouse winking at him indifferently. Abruptly he laid his hand on Alec's hand and spoke to him at great length, with considerable feeling, even with passion. He shook him twice by the lapels. Then he gave him a long distasteful look and folding his arms on the quaywall contemplated the upturned dog again. Behind them the old tram departed for town, crickety-crockety, taking its light with it, leaving them to the dark, the sucking water, the chill wind. They fell silent.

Alec also looked morosely at the drowned dog. Then he glanced across the road at the city's last pub—it is called '*The Cosmopolitan Bar*'—and said, '*Cognac?*' The young man agreed, so they went across the road and had some more Irish whiskey.

'Constanzia, now,' declared Alec, '*is a grand port!*'

But he saw that his guest was rolling his whiskey around in his glass and paying no attention.

'Allons,' Alec sighed. '*Grub.*'

In silence they marched across a little wooden railway-bridge up a steep hill, between the damp walls of an alley whose rare gaslamps flickered on the ivy that glistened beneath them. Far behind and beneath, to the turned head, the walls framed the little city's distended glow. They halted at a tiny lodge, an Elizabethan cottage, the rear entrance to the grounds of somebody's suburban mansion. There was a fluttering of leaves overhead. There was a smell of damp laurels and woodsmoke.

The door of the cottage opened on a burst of light and an overheated kitchen. Two redheaded girls of about sixteen and seventeen looked up at them. Both were warm, puffy, negligent and handsome. The elder and slimmer was standing over an ironing board in the strained pose of any girl ironing—the elbow bent, the knee crooked, one shoulder lifted. Her eyes made the young man think at once of green rock-pools. The younger one was curled in a battered basket-chair before the little stove, her red hair tumbled over her book. She had those gently voluptuous lips that rest perpetually apart like a little trumpet, as if she were always whispering, 'Goose, goose, goose.'

Alec waved introductions: 'That's Molly. This is Jenny. This is. . .' He looked at the youth.

He was staring around the little kitchen, at the girls, at Alec. A long, slow blush was mounting to his forehead. It retired swiftly as if a glass were emptying and he became quite pale.

'Je m'appelle Paul Demus.'

'We'll call yeh Paul.'

The young man bowed respectfully to the girls. They grinned so eagerly that he could guess no boy had so far done anything but chase them in the dark until they screamed, probably down that steep hill, under the gaslamps, their red hair flying.

'Sit down, Paul. Grub, girls! Prestissimo!'

The youth watched while they sat their father on the basket-chair, unlaced his boots, brought his slippers, handed him his evening paper and his glasses. He gazed restlessly about him, and once he half-rose as if to go. But now they were talking to him in a macaroni of which he recognised one or two English words, bits of French, and a tongue which nobody ever told him was Irish. However, as they glanced at him, tossed back their curls, made him lay the table, passed him the jam or the pickles or refilled his cup, they also spoke a language which occurs in no dictionary but which he found entirely intelligible and which he soon began to speak just as volubly.

He showed them photographs from his wallet, of his mother, his two sisters, his friends in l'équipe. To explain the word he had to borrow their dictionary and that started a game which moved faster and faster as they became adept at flicking the pages and passing the book to and fro across the table.



'Regardez, mesdemoiselles.' He nicked a word. '*Oriflamme.*'

'Quoi?'

'Vos cheveux!' Tipping Jenny's hair.

'Oriflamme? Oh! Oh!'

'What are ye laughing about? What's that? What's he saying?'

'He says 'tis a warm night, daddy.'

'Then why don't ye open the window?'

'Regardez, monsieur. Vous êtes un *rogue.*'

'Quoi? Coquin? Moi? Non, non! Regardez. *De tout mon coeur.*'

'What does that mean?' seizing the book, 'Oh! Oh! Regardez! *Heartless.*'

'Moi? *Sans coeur?* Non, non! Regardez. *Qui a le coeur navré, brisé, mort.*'

'What's all this about regardez? Is that window to his liking? What the divil are ye all up to?'

But the three paid no attention. They were leaning over the table in a jumble, laughing, pushing, hair tumbling. The girls pointed to the words:—

'*Qui a le coeur libre!*'

He replied:—'*Si le coeur vous en dit!*'

'Oh! Oh! Look! *Loin des yeux, loin de coeur.*'

'Oh! Mesdemoiselles!'

Alec laughed happily at their laughter, and returned to his paper.

The noise became louder. He shouted:—

'Regardez yerself, Paul, is that window all right?' At once, gleefully, Paul seized the book and nicked, '*Vue, elevation, perspective, scène,*' and for answer to his question Alec beheld Molly and Monsieur Paul go out into the porch with so much laughing that he demanded, 'What on earth is it all about, Jenny?'

'I think he just wants to see the view of the city,' Jenny explained demurely.

'Sure that's what the boy is at all the night with his regardez. Is that all the French ye have? I could have told ye that meself,' and he resumed his reading.

When Molly returned her hair was like heather on fire. Then Jenny showed him the view, and then Molly showed him the



view again, and each time they took a little longer at it, and the next time Paul wanted to see the view Alec got up and declared that they didn't know how to show him the view at all and went out with the three of them.

There the four of them stood in the dark, in a line, their arms about one another's shoulders, looking at the thousands of little lights, and the occasional lightning flash when, somewhere, a tram-trolley hopped the wire.

'Do you know what it is Paul? It's a damn nice little city. It reminds me sometimes of the view over Marseille. Comprenez vous, monseieur?'

The youth did not reply. It seemed at first that he was considering what Alec had said. Then he shook himself and cried abruptly, 'Faut que je file!'

'Go?' Jenny cried. 'Oh, no, no! Paul, not yet!'

And Molly wailed,

'Oh, but not yet?'

Alec cried,

'By no means. Not yet! We're going to have a long talk together. Parlez beaucoup. Vous, moi. Lots of things!'

It was no good. He insisted. He was almost rude about it. They held him. He tore himself away. They gave in. The two girls went with him, down the dark alley, over the city, swinging out of his arms, gabbling about the nuns, and Mother O'Brien who had once been to France, and about the rugby-match, and when they got to the tramstop he refused to part with them unless they first came with him into the Cosmopolitan Bar.

There they sat in a corner and over hot whiskey punch—it was their idea; they said they had it every Christmas—he explained to them at great length something which was evidently of great emotional importance to himself. To everything they nodded seriously and said, 'Oui,' and 'Non,' and kept making beseeching frowns at one another across the table, and lifting their eyebrows behind his back and shaking their heads, but when he finished and shook their hands over and over again and said, 'Vous comprenez maintenant?' they said, 'Parfaitement,' and shrugged furiously at one another like Frenchwomen.

He rose and they had to help him up, and all three were laughing as they shoved him into the tram. From the step he kissed them both, to the delight of the conductor and under the frowning eyes of a severe looking priest sitting inside. When the tram was jolting away their friend was deep in explanations to the priest who kept staring at him like an image.

All the way up the dark laneway they argued heatedly. Jenny said he was a Count. Molly said he was engaged to be married to a girl whom he did not love. But they did not quarrel over it and when their da looked up at the two of them, standing side by side in the porch, the eyes that gazed down at him were starry.

His were not, and seeing his melancholy look they drooped a little.

'Didn't he go off a bit early?' he complained. 'I thought we were getting on fine. I hope ye didn't say anything to offend him?'

Jenny hurled her green beret on to the sofa, and leaned her elbows on the windowsill and looked tragically over the diamonded city. Molly slowly lifted her tam-o-shanter from her red mop, until it was like a chef's hat, and then sank slowly at his knees in a ball and softly said, wrapping her arms about his legs: —

'Fa'rer. Why dosh yeh tell ush shomethin' about Marsheille?'

Alec started up, glared at the two of them over his specs and opened his mouth to say something. Just then, far below on the river, a ship, sailing outward on the tide, hooted softly. He leaned back.

'Marseille?' he murmured.

He looked into the fire. Smiling he began to stroke his moustaches and his beard.

They gave the poor old buffer twenty minutes.



## JAMES STEPHENS

### A Rhinoceros, Some Ladies, and a Horse

ONE DAY, in my first job, a lady fell in love with me. It was quite unreasonable, of course, for I wasn't wonderful: I was small and thin, and I weighed much the same as a largish duck-egg. I didn't fall in love with her, or anything like that. I got under the table, and stayed there until she had to go wherever she had to go to.

I had seen an advertisement—"Smart boy wanted," it said. My legs were the smartest things about me, so I went there on the run. I got the job.

At that time there was nothing on God's earth that I could do, except run. I had no brains, and I had no memory. When I was told to do anything I got into such an enthusiasm about it that I couldn't remember anything else about it. I just ran as hard as I could, and then I ran back, proud and panting. And when they asked me for the whatever-it-was that I had run for, I started, right on the instant, and ran some more.

The place I was working at was, amongst other things, a theatrical agency. I used to be sitting in a corner of the office, waiting to be told to run somewhere and back. A lady would come in—a music-hall lady that is—and, in about five minutes, howls of joy would start coming from the inner office. Then, peacefully enough, the lady and my two bosses would come out, and the lady always said, "Splits! I can do splits like no one. Look!" And thereupon she did a split right there on the office floor. And one of my bosses would say, "I'm keeping your splits in mind." And the other would add, gallantly,—“No one who ever saw your splits could ever forget 'em.”

One of my bosses was thin, and the other one was fat. My fat boss was composed entirely of stomachs. He had three baby-stomachs under his chin: then he had three more descending

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in ever larger englobings nearly to the ground: but, just before reaching the ground, the final stomach bifurcated into a pair of boots. He was very light on these and could bounce about in the neatest way.

He was the fattest thing I have ever seen, except a rhinoceros that I had met in the Zoo the Sunday before I got my job. That rhino was *very* fat, and it had a smell like twenty-five pigs. I was standing outside its palisade, wondering what it could possibly feel like to be a rhinoceros, when two larger boys passed by. Suddenly they caught hold of me, and pushed me through the bars of the palisade. I was very skinny, and in about two seconds I was right inside, and in three seconds the two boys were running away, and the rhinoceros was looking at me.

It was very fat, but it wasn't fat like stomachs, it was fat like barrels of cement, and when it moved it creaked a lot, like a woman I used to know who creaked like an old bedstead. The rhinoceros swaggled over to me with a bunch of cabbage sticking out of its mouth. It wasn't angry, or anything like that, it just wanted to see who I was. Rhinos are blindish: they mainly see by smelling, and they smell in snorts. This one started at my left shoe, and snorted right up that side of me to my ear. He smelt that very carefully: then he switched over to my right ear, and snorted right down that side of me to my right shoe: then he fell in love with my shoes and began to lick them. I, naturally, wriggled my feet at that, and the big chap was so astonished that he did the strangest step-dance backwards to his pile of cabbages, and began to eat them.

I squeezed myself out of his cage and walked away. In a couple of minutes I saw the two boys. They were very frightened, and they asked me what I had done to the rhinoceros. I answered, a bit grandly, perhaps, that I had seized it in both hands, ripped it limb from limb, and tossed its carcase to the crows. But when they began shouting to people that I had just murdered a rhinoceros I took to my heels, for I didn't want to be arrested and hanged for a murder that I hadn't committed.

Still, a man can't be as fat as a rhinoceros, but my boss was as fat as a man can be. One day a great lady of the halls came in, and was received on the knee. She was very great. Her name was Maudie Darling, or thereabouts. My bosses called her nothing but "Darling," and she called them the same. When the time



came for her to arrive the whole building got palpitations of the heart. After waiting a while my thin boss got angry, and said—"Who does the woman think she is? If she isn't here in two twos I'll go down to the entry, and when she does come I'll boot her out." The fat boss said—"She's only two hours late, she'll be here before the week's out."

Within a few minutes there came great clamours from the court-yard. Patriotic cheers, such as Parnell himself never got, were thundering. My bosses ran instantly to the inner office. Then the door opened, and the lady appeared.

She was very wide, and deep, and magnificent. She was dressed in camels and zebras and goats: she had two peacocks in her hat and a rabbit muff in her hand, and she strode among these with prancings.

But when she got right into the room and saw herself being looked at by three men and a boy she became adorably shy: one could see that she had never been looked at before.

"O," said she, with a smile that made three and a half hearts beat like one, "O," said she, very modestly, "is Mr. Which-of-'em-is-it really in. Please tell him that Little-Miss-Me would be so glad to see and to be—"

Then the inner door opened, and the large lady was surrounded by my fat boss and my thin boss. She crooned to them—"O, you dear boys, you'll never know how much I've thought of you and longed to see you."

That remark left me stupified. The first day I got to the office I heard that it was the fat boss's birthday, and that he was thirty years of age: and the thin boss didn't look a day younger than the fat one. How the lady could mistake these old men for boys seemed to me the strangest fact that had ever come my way. My own bet was that they'd both die of old age in about a month.

After a while they all came out again. The lady was helpless with laughter: she had to be supported by my two bosses—"O," she cried, "you boys will kill me." And the bosses laughed and laughed, and the fat one said—"Darling, you're a scream," and the thin one said—"Darling, you're a riot."

And then . . . she saw me! I saw her seeing me the very way I had seen the rhinoceros seeing me: I wondered for an instant would she smell me down one leg and up the other. She swept my two bosses right away from her, and she became a kind of



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queen, very glorious to behold: but sad, startled. She stretched a long, slow arm out and out and out, and then she unfolded a long, slow finger, and pointed it at me—"Who is THAT ??" she whispered in a strange whisper that could be heard two miles off.

My fat boss was an awful liar—"The cat brought that in," said he.

But the thin boss rebuked him: "No," he said, "it was not the cat. Let me introduce you; darling, this is James. James, this is the darling of the gods."

"And of the pit," said she, sternly.

She looked at me again. Then she sank to her knees and spread out both arms to me—

"Come to my Boozalum, angel," said she in a tender kind of way.

I knew what she meant, and I knew that she didn't know how to pronounce that word. I took a rapid glance at the area indicated. The lady had a Boozalum you could graze a cow on. I didn't wait one second, but slid, in one swift, silent slide, under the table. Then she came forward and said a whole lot of poems to me under the table, imploring me, among a lot of odd things, to "come forth, and gild the morning with my eyes," but at last she was reduced to whistling at me with two fingers in her mouth, the way you whistle for a cab.

I learned after she had gone that most of the things she said to me were written by a poet fellow named Spokeshave. They were very complimentary, but I couldn't love a woman who mistook my old bosses for boys, and had a boozalum that it would take an Arab chieftain a week to trot across on a camel.

The thin boss pulled me from under the table by my leg, and said that my way was the proper way to treat a rip, but my fat boss said, very gravely—"James, when a lady invites a gentleman to her boozalum a real gentleman hops there as pronto as possible, and I'll have none but real gentlemen in this office."

"Tell me," he went on, "what made that wad of Turkish Delight fall in love with you?"

"She didn't love me at all, sir," I answered.

"No?" he enquired.

"She was making fun of me," I explained.

"There's something in that," said he seriously, and went back to his office.

I had been expecting to be sacked that day. I was sacked the next day, but that was about a horse.

\* \* \* \* \*

I had been given three letters to post, and told to run or they'd be too late. So I ran to the post office and round it and back, with, naturally, the three letters still in my pocket. As I came to our door a nice, solid, red-faced man rode up on a horse. He thrust the reins into my hand—

"Hold the horse for a minute," said he.

"I can't," I replied, "my boss is waiting for me."

"I'll only be a minute," said he angrily, and he walked off.

Well, there I was, saddled, as it were, with a horse. I looked at it, and it looked at me. Then it blew a pint of soap-suds out of its nose and took another look at me, and then the horse fell in love with me as if he had just found his long-lost foal. He started to lean against me and to woo me with small whinneys, and I responded and replied as best I could—

"Don't move a toe," said I to the horse, "I'll be back in a minute."

He understood exactly what I said, and the only move he made was to swing his head and watch me as I darted up the street. I was less than half a minute away anyhow, and never out of his sight.

Up the street there was a man, and sometimes a woman, with a barrow, thick-piled with cabbages and oranges and apples. As I raced round the barrow I pinched an apple off it at full speed, and in ten seconds I was back at the horse. The good nag had watched every move I made, and when I got back his eyes were wide open, his mouth was wide open, and he had his legs all splayed out so that he couldn't possibly slip. I broke the apple in halves and popped one half into his mouth. He ate it in slow crunches, and then he looked diligently at the other half. I gave him the other half, and, as he ate it, he gurgled with cidery gargles of pure joy. He then swung his head round from me and pointed his nose up the street, right at the apple-barrow.

I raced up the street again, and was back within the half-minute with another apple. The horse had nigh finished the first half of it when a man who had come up said, thoughtfully—

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"He seems to like apples, bedad!"

"He loves them," said I.

And then, exactly at the speed of lightning, the man became angry, and invented bristles all over himself like a porcupine—

"What the hell do you mean," he hissed, and then he bawled, "by stealing my apples?"

I retreated a bit into the horse—

"I didn't steal your apples," I said.

"You didn't!" he roared, and then he hissed, "I saw you," he hissed.

"I didn't steal them," I explained, "I pinched them."

"Tell me that one again," said he.

"If," said I patiently, "if I took the apples for myself that would be stealing."

"So it would," he agreed.

"But as I only took them for the horse that's pinching."

"Be dam, but!" said he. "'Tis a real argument," he went on, staring at the sky. "Answer me that one," he demanded of himself, and he in a very stupor of inteflection. "I give it up," he roared, "you give me back my apples."

I placed the half apple that was left into his hand, and he looked at it as if it was a dead frog—

"What'll I do with that?" he asked earnestly.

"Give it to the horse," said I.

The horse was now prancing at him, and mincing at him, and making love at him. He pushed the half apple into the horse's mouth, and the horse mumbled it and watched him, and chewed it and watched him, and gurgled it and watched him—

"He does like his bit of apple," said the man.

"He likes you too," said I. "I think he loves you."

"It looks like it," he agreed, for the horse was yearning at him, and its eyes were soulful.

"Let's get him another apple," said I, and, without another word, we both pounded back to his barrow and each of us pinched an apple off it. We got one apple into the horse, and were breaking the second one when a woman said gently—

"Nice, kind, Christian gentlemen, feeding dumb animals—with my apples," she yelled suddenly.

The man with me jumped as if he had been hit by a train—

"Mary," said he humbly.

"Joseph," said she in a completely unloving voice.

But the woman transformed herself into nothing else but woman—

"What about my apples?" said she. "How many have we lost?"

"Three," said Joseph.

"Four," said I, "I pinched three and you pinched one."

"That's true," said he. "That's exact, Mary. I only pinched one of our apples."

"You only," she squealed—

And I, hoping to be useful, broke in—

"Joseph," said I, "is the nice lady your boss?"

He halted for a dreadful second, and then made up his mind—

"You bet she's my boss," said he, "and she's better than that, for she's the very wife of my bosom."

She turned to me—

"Child of Grace—" said she—

Now, when I was a child, and did something that a woman didn't like she always expostulated in the same way. If I tramped on her foot, or jabbed her in the stomach—the way women have multitudes of feet and stomachs is always astonishing to a child—the remark such a woman made was always the same. She would grab her toe or her stomach, and say—"Childagrace, what the hell are you doing?" After a while I worked it out that Childagrace was one word, and was my name. When any woman in agony yelled Childagrace I ran right up prepared to be punished, and the woman always said, tenderly, "What are you yowling about, Childagrace."

"Childagrace," said Mary earnestly, "how's my family to live if you steal our apples? You take my livelihood away from me! Very good, but will you feed and clothe and educate my children in," she continued proudly, "the condition to which they are accustomed?"

I answered that question cautiously—

"How many kids have you, ma'am?" said I.

"We'll leave that alone for a while," she went on. "You owe me two and six for the apples."

"Mary!" said Joseph, in a pained voice.



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"And you," she snarled at him, "owe me three shillings. I'll take it out of you in pints." She turned to me—

"What do you do with all the money you get from the office here?"

"I give it to my landlady."

"Does she stick to the lot of it?"

"Oh, no," I answered, "she always gives me back threepence."

"Well, you come and live with me and I'll give you back fourpence."

"All right," said I.

"By gum," said Joseph, enthusiastically, "that'll be fine. We'll go out every night, and we won't steal a thing. We'll just pinch legs of beef, and pig's feet, and barrels of beer—"

"Wait now," said Mary. "You stick to your own landlady. I've trouble enough of my own. You needn't pay me the two and six."

"Good for you," said Joseph heartily, and then, to me—

"You just get a wife of your bosum half as kind as the wife of my bosum and you'll be set up for life. Mary," he cried joyfully, "let's go and have a pint on the strength of it."

"You shut up," said she.

"Joseph," I interrupted, "knows how to pronounce that word properly."

"What word?"

"The one he used when he said you were the wife of his what-you-may-call-it."

"I'm not the wife of any man's what-you-may-call-it," said she, indignantly—"Oh, I see what you mean! So he pronounced it well, did he?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She looked at me very sternly—

"How does it come you know about all these kinds of words?"

"Yes," said Joseph, and he was even sterner than she was, "when I was your age I didn't know any bad words."

"You shut up," said she, and continued, "what made you say that to me?"

"A woman came into our office yesterday, and she mispronounced it."

"What did she say now?"

"Oh, she said it all wrong."



"Do you tell me so? We're all friends here: what way did she say it, son?"

"Well, ma'am, she called it boozalum."

"She said it wrong all right," said Joseph, "but 'tis a good, round, fat kind of a word all the same."

"You shut up," said Mary. "Who did she say the word to?"

"She said it to me, ma'am."

"She must have been a rip," said Joseph.

"Was she a rip, now?"

"I don't know, ma'am, I never met a rip."

"You're too young yet," said Joseph, "but you'll meet them later on. I never met a rip myself until I got married—I mean," he added hastily, "that they were all rips except the wife of my what-do-you-call-ems, and that's why I married her."

"I expect you've got a barrel-full of rips in your past," said she bleakly, "you must tell me about some of them tonight." And then, to me, "tell us about the woman," said she.

So I told them all about her, and how she held out her arms to me, and said, "Come to my boozalum, angel."

"What did you do when she shoved out the old arms at you?" said Joseph.

"I got under the table," I answered.

"That's not a bad place at all, but," he continued earnestly, "never get under the bed when there's an old girl chasing you, for that's the worst spot you could pick on. What was the strap's name?"

"Maudie Darling, she called herself."

"You're a blooming lunatic," said Joseph, "she's the loveliest thing in the world, barring," he added hastily, "the wife of my blast-the-bloody-word."

"We saw her last night," said Mary, "at Dan Lowrey's Theatre, and she's just lovely."

"She isn't as nice as you, ma'm," I asserted.

"Do you tell me that now?" said she.

"You are twice as nice as she is, and twenty times nicer."

"There you are," said Joseph, "the very words I said to you last night."

"You shut up," said Mary scornfully, "you were trying to knock a pint out of me! Listen, son," she went on, "we'll take

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all that back about your landlady. You come and live with me, and I'll give you back sixpence a week out of your wages."

"All right, ma'm," I crowed in a perfectly monstrous joy.

"Mary," said Joseph, in a reluctant voice—

"You shut up," said she.

"He can't come to live with us," said Joseph. "He's a bloody Prodestan," he added sadly.

"Why—" she began—

"He'd keep me and the childer up all night, pinching apples for horses and asses, and reading the bible, and up to every kind of devilment."

Mary made up her mind quickly—

"You stick to your own landlady," said she, "tell her that I said she was to give you sixpence." She whirled about, "There won't be a thing left on that barrow," said she to Joseph.

"Dam the scrap," said Joseph violently.

"Listen," said Mary to me very earnestly, "am I nicer than Maudie Darling?"

"You are, ma'm," said I.

Mary went down on the road on her knees: she stretched out both arms to me, and said—

"Come to my boozalum, angel."

I looked at her, and I looked at Joseph, and I looked at the horse. Then I turned from them all and ran into the building and into the office. My fat boss met me—

"Here's your five bob," said he. "Get to hell out of here," said he.

And I ran out.

I went to the horse, and leaned my head against the thick end of his neck, and the horse leaned as much of himself against me as he could manage. Then the man who owned the horse came up and climbed into his saddle. He fumbled in his pocket—

"You were too long," said I. "I've been sacked for minding your horse."

"That's too bad," said he: "that's too damn bad," and he tossed me a penny.

I caught it, and lobbed it back into his lap, and I strode down the street the most outraged human being then living in the world.

# LOUIS MACNEICE



## The Strand

White Tintoretto clouds beneath my naked feet,  
This mirror of wet sand imputes a lasting mood  
To island trancies; my steps repeat

Someone's who now has left such strands for good  
Carrying his boots and paddling like a child,  
A square black figure whom the horizon understood—

My father. Who for all his responsibly compiled  
Account books of a devout, precise routine  
Kept something in him solitary and wild,

So loved the Western sea and no tree's green  
Fulfilled him like these contours of Slievemore  
Menaun and Croaghaun and the bogs between.

Sixty-odd years behind him and twelve before,  
Eying the flange of steel in the turning belt of brine  
It was sixteen years ago he walked this shore

And the mirror caught his shape which catches mine  
But then as now the floor-mop of the foam  
Blotted the bright reflections—and no sign

Remains of face or feet when visitors have gone home.

## FRANK O'CONNOR



### The Stepmother

BOB DESMOND was my great pal. He was a good-looking, well-mannered lad with a plump, good-natured face and big brown eyes—very candid and pleasant when he smiled, but rather gloomy when he didn't. Between us we read every sort of boys' storybook that we could lay hands on, and as we were the only fellows in the district who did, we had the public school code all to ourselves. We didn't split, we didn't tell lies, anyone that hit Bob hit me as well; and as the monks (our teachers) had never heard of the public school code and expected us to tell lies, they mistook it for insubordination and beat blazes out of us. Generally, we came out of that ordeal well. The great thing was not to shriek and try to get away from the monk, not to stick your damaged hand under your armpit and go back snivelling, but smile serenely as if you forgave them for it and then stroll quietly back to your desk. It made the monks very sick.

Bob's father was married a second time. That came as a great shock to the neighbourhood for he and Bob's mother were a very united couple. She was a quiet, hard-working woman while Mr. Desmond was big and jolly and emotional. He was wrapped up in the children; if one of them had a pain in his toe the doctor was called. I envied Bob because he could always get the books and toys he wanted. Her death brought a terrible change in the house. Bob would come in from school, and find his father, a big powerful man lying on the bed with one of her old frocks, kissing it and weeping into it. Bob would sit on the bed and try to comfort him, telling him not to mind, that mummy was in heaven, and so on and so forth. That was bad enough, but Mr. Desmond did it in public, too, and that distressed Bob more than anything. He was a proud kid and rather tongue-tied.



Everyone was very sorry for his father. Then inside a couple of months he was going to the pictures with another woman, and finally married her. My mother never forgave him for that. I think she felt he had deceived her as well as his dead wife.

The second Mrs. Desmond was a tidy little piece as my father called her, good-looking, rough in the tongue, lively and very good-natured. She was particularly good to Bob, and didn't treat him as a kid so much as a grown-up she could flirt with. In some ways I fancy he was as grown-up as she was. She was mad on amusement, and every evening herself and Mr. Desmond went off arm in arm to card-parties and shows. That was Bob's trouble. He had a sister called Sheela who was a real heart-scald, and as they had no maid, one or the other of them had to stay in and mind the house.

'Which of ye is going to stay in to-night?' Mrs. Desmond would call as she scampered down the stairs and went to admire herself in the mirror. 'Sheela, you mind the house to-night.'

'Why would I?' Sheela would bawl at once. 'Can't Bob do it? I did it the last night.'

'You did not do it the last night,' Bob would say in his slow way. It always took time for Bob's anger to get under way, for he was never quick enough off the mark with people like Sheela who told lies by second nature. It gave her a decided advantage.

'But I have to go up to Susie Cross's to get the answers to my eckera,' Sheela would cry, her voice going up to the top note in her register.

'Ah, you're always the same,' Mrs. Desmond would cry in disgust, shaking herself down inside her frock and giving the little hat a tug as she smiled into the mirror. 'You have as much old guff about it!'

'Christmas, I have no blooming life in this house,' Sheela would cry, bursting into floods of tears, and go upstairs to throw herself face downward on the bed. That sometimes worked if her father happened to drop in. He was an emotional man himself and a bit of despair never came amiss with him. He would come down with a grave face and take Bob aside and sixpence would settle Sheela's troubles for the evening. But when he didn't there was sometimes hell to pay with Sheela. They were no sooner outside the door than she was at it with her long

legs crossed and a wild look in her eye. I could hear her myself from our house, bawling across the avenue to the Ryan girl, and it made me wish that someone would smother her. 'I can't go out,' the long, accusing, half savage cry would ring out. 'I have to mind the ould house.' Then the Ryan girl would cross the avenue to her, and Sheela would sprawl across the little gate with her arms folded and her head in her hands. They gabbled away thirteen to the dozen while the dusk came on, the gaslamp was lit, and the kids in their white pinnies gathered round it. That drove Sheela distracted. By the time I called for Bob she was desperate. She came in with a worried air, plucking at her black pigtails.

'Bob,' she would plead unctuously in the tone of a young mother, begging you to look after the baby while she ran upstairs for the bottle, 'would you ever mind the house just for five minutes? I only want to run up to Susie Cross's for the answers.'

'I'll do nothing of the sort,' Bob would growl in alarm. 'Why can't she come down to you?'

'Because she have to mind the house too, Bob. As true as God, I'll be killed in school tomorrqw. Look, Bob, that the Almighty God might strike me stone cold this minute, I won't be five minutes.'

'Yes,' growled Bob who knew her little ways, 'and then stop out for two hours!'

'I wouldn't, Bob, I wouldn't, I wouldn't,' she would say joining her hands and wagging her pigtails piously. 'Oh, that's as true as if I was to die tonight.'

'Ah, go on!' Bob would say angrily (he hated having to refuse her) 'you have no word.'

'All right so,' she would spit, hands on hips, the very incarnation of a virago of twelve. 'You needn't, you dirty, rotten, good-for-nothing, ignorant pig!'

Then she would go to the front door again with an air of great gloom and grandeur, drift towards the gate with folded arms as if she was going to tell the others she wouldn't be out, and then—the voices round the gaslamp or the twinkling of the first star waking some wild instinct in her blood—one glance back, one hasty, immodest tug at her garter, and she was off like the wind. You could hear her shrill cries from far away. God, how I hated that girl!

Of course, Bob could have ignored it and come off with me to the barrack where we had friends among the Tommies, but when his parents came back it would have meant a walloping for Sheela. That, according to Bob, wouldn't have been cricket. It seemed to me a nice point whether cricket applied to people like Sheela, but Bob took the line that it did, and after all, she was his sister. So like the captain of the sinking ship, Bob told me to go to the barrack by myself, and I, playing up to the part of the devoted friend, said that of course, it didn't matter, and instead of prowling round the barrack in the dusk, picking up cigarette pictures and strange characters, we sat down in the front room to a rotten game of checkers. My only consolation was that Bob prophesied gloomily that Sheela would come to a bad end. From my point of view the sooner that happened the better.

Actually it happened quite soon. One day she stayed at home from school, pretending to be sick, and was left in charge of the house and the dinner by her stepmother. When Mrs. Desmond came back from town just before Bob was due in from school, the door was wide open, the fire out and the dinner ruined. Of course, there was no sign of Sheela. Bob came in and gave a hand, but she was in a flaming temper, and everything went against her. At last Sheela herself, driven by hunger, came back.

'Where were you?' shouted her stepmother indignantly.

'I was out,' said Sheela, fear making her brazen. 'Oh, Jay!' she cried, letting on to be astonished at the sight that awaited her. 'Did the fire go out on you? And I not gone five minutes!'

'Go on and light that fire,' shouted Mrs. Desmond.

'Who are you talking to?' asked Sheela impudently.

'What's that you said?' cried Mrs. Desmond, taking a step or two towards her.

'I'm not going to be turned into a skivvy by you or anyone else,' said Sheela, beginning to cry.

'Light that fire at once, I say,' said her stepmother, taking her by the arm and giving her a good shaking.

'Take your hands off me, you dirty thing, or I'll open you!' cried Sheela through her sobs.

Then it seemed Mrs. Desmond, out of patience, gave her a good cuff; Sheela went for the potstick, and Bob, sick at heart tried to intervene.

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'I wish you'd let Sheela alone,' he said in a complaining voice.

'Come on now,' cried Sheela, seeing Bob between her and her stepmother and brandishing the potstick for all she was worth, 'come on and I'll give you enough for it!'

Now, Mrs. Desmond wasn't a malicious woman by any manner of means, but she had a temper, and a saint in heaven wouldn't have stood the spectacle of this skinny little thing in pigtails waving the potstick and inviting her to come on. She came on in one fell swoop, snatched the potstick from Sheela and gave her three or four good hard wallops across the backside with it. 'Jesus! Jesus!' shrieked Sheela at the top of her voice. 'Me hip is broken!' Then Bob lost his head. He forced his way between them grimly, and when Mrs. Desmond pushed him off he kicked her. She suddenly dropped the potstick, doubled up and collapsed into a chair, nursing her shin. Her face was contracted with agony.

'You vicious little cur!' she cried between tears and rage.

'Well,' said Bob in a low voice, 'you shouldn't hit my sister.'

'All right,' she said bitterly, 'I'm done with ye now. I'll let your father deal with you.'

Bob came and called for me, looking very white. My mother saw that something was wrong. She had a soft spot for Bob, seeing him like that with no mother, and a father who had so deeply disillusioned her. She felt sure he was neglected.

'Isn't it early you're out, Bob?' she exclaimed. 'Had you your dinner already?'

Bob smilingly made some excuse about the fire being out, and she insisted on his having a cup of tea with me. It was only as we were going down the Glen where most of our afternoons were spent that he told me what had happened. I was shocked, and I think he was a bit shocked himself—kicking wasn't cricket and kicking a woman was worse—for he put on a cynical grown-up air.

'And what'll your old fellow do?' I asked.

'Oh, I don't care,' he said moodily. 'Anyway, I can always go in the Navy.'

I had no theoretical objection to the Navy, but we were both army men, and it seemed a drastic course to take for someone like Sheela who was only half human. Protecting women and



children was all very well, but the people who had thought of it hadn't met Sheila.

'Anyway,' he growled, 'she's my sister, and she hasn't anyone else to take her part.'

The Glen was great fun that day for not only was there firing practice but bugle practice as well, and a young Corporal gave us a lesson on the side. We were late coming home, and by that time we had both forgotten the very existence of the Navy. Bob had a paper for me, so I went with him to his house. As we reached the avenue he suddenly fell silent and said in a low voice, 'Wait, here and I'll bring it out to you.' I didn't see why I should wait, so after a moment I followed him up to the door. Then I heard his father's voice and remembered what had happened. To my relief his father didn't sound angry, only a little upset.

'What's this I hear about you, Bob?' he asked. 'Is it true that you kicked mother to-day?'

'Yes, daddy,' said Bob. He waited a moment and said 'I'm sorry.'

'I'm surprised at you, Bob,' his father went on. 'I wouldn't mind Sheila so much, but I expected better of you. What made you do such a thing?'

'Mother hit Sheila, daddy,' replied Bob in a troubled voice.

'And Sheila was impudent,' Mrs. Desmond said scoldingly, 'and you know perfectly well she deserved it.'

'Is that right, Bob?' asked his father.

'Oh, it's quite right,' said Bob candidly. 'She's always doing it and I know she needs a licking.'

'Then why did you interfere?' asked his father testily.

'Because it's not mother's place to hit her,' replied Bob in a sullen tone.

In spite of my doubts of Sheila's status I nearly said 'Hear, hear!' I didn't feel as if I were eavesdropping, so much as giving Bob moral support from the door. That was the way I should have liked to talk back to the monks; not defiantly, but just showing them where they were wrong.

'Oh, is that so, Bob?' his stepmother asked mockingly on a rising note. 'Thanks for telling me. I'll know better next time.'

'What way is that to speak in front of mother, Bob?' asked his father, and this time he really was angry.

'But it's true, daddy,' Bob said pleadingly. 'I know Sheela did wrong, and I know she deserved to be punished, but mother should tell you instead of punishing her herself.'

'You see,' said Mrs. Desmond with bitter irony and in a loud voice, 'I simply have no business in this house.'

'What do you mean?' Mr. Desmond asked furiously. 'Why shouldn't she punish her?'

'Because she's not our mother,' Bob replied steadfastly. I had never felt so proud of him as then, but just at that moment I heard a sound that made my heart turn over; just a clout and a cry of pain from Bob. It must have been a real staggerer, for we made a point of not yowling. I nearly went mad, and I am still surprised that I didn't go in then and there and remonstrate with Mr. Desmond. If it had been school I would, but it was different in another chap's own house. I walked away and shut my eyes. At that age you feel so damnably helpless.

'Isn't she?' asked Mr. Desmond with a vicious intonation I had never heard before.

'She isn't, she isn't,' cried Bob, and again he cried out with pain and I could almost see him crouching with his hands over his head from the rain of blows. I had been trying to get away but this time I went back, intending to knock and ask for Bob. I was halted in this by Mrs. Desmond's voice.

'Ah, for God's sake, don't hit the child like that, Charlie,' she cried in surprise and concern. 'It doesn't matter. Let him alone!'

'I'll show him who's going to be master in this house,' snarled her husband.

'Stop it, I say!' she cried sharply, and I knew she was getting between them. 'If you want to punish someone, punish Sheela. She's the cause of it all.'

'I'll knock the lights out of this little puppy first,' said her husband thickly, and then there was the sound of a scuffle, and I knew she was dragging him off Bob. By this time the thing had become public property. The woman next door came out as if she was wondering when her husband was going to come.

'Stop it this instant,' Mrs. Desmond cried shrilly. 'You're worse than the child.'

'Let me alone!' he shouted. 'I'm going to teach him.'

'Fitter for you to teach yourself,' she cried. 'Leave the child

to me, can't you. . . . And, indeed, Bob,' she added bitterly, 'you're the last I thought would behave like that to me.'

'I'll show him how to behave,' said his father frantically.

'God Almighty,' she shouted, 'the child has more sense than you. What way is that for a grown man to carry on? Do you want to put him into convulsions on me? . . . Come here to me, Bob,' she added gently, and then the sounds in the kitchen died away, all but Bob's stifled sobbing. I may as well admit that I was sobbing too. 'Now look at the state you're in!' she said complainingly. 'Here, let me dry your eyes, and look up at me. Are we going to be friends again?'

'Yes, mother.'

'And no more kicking?'

'No, mother.'

'I don't mind you getting into a wax with me, but that's a different thing. You know you wouldn't kick a dog the way you kicked me. That's true, isn't it? . . . Go away, Charlie,' she cried in exasperation. 'Go out somewhere and let us alone. . . . What did you say, Bob?'

Bob said something which I didn't catch, and neither, it seemed did she.

'You what?' she cried.

'I promised mummy not to let you hit Sheela,' he said.

'You promised your mummy?' she cried. 'But sure you couldn't do that, Bob!'

'I had to,' he said, sniffing. 'She asked me to.'

'Ah, but listen, Bob,' she said with just the least trace of amusement, 'sure, I never knew your mummy, son, and your mummy never knew me. She couldn't ask you to do a thing like that. You must have been dreaming.'

'I wasn't dreaming,' he said indignantly.

'But when was this?' she asked.

'The day before she died.'

'The day before she died?'

'Yes, after Father Cronin went. Mrs. O'Regan said she wanted to see Sheela and me and then mummy asked me to stay.'

'You're not serious, Bob,' she said.

'I am,' said Bob. 'And then she said when she was gone away daddy would bring another woman in, and that you wouldn't

like us and beat us. So she made me promise whenever you hit Sheela or me that I'd hit you back.'

Even I who had only the very slightest notion of what Bob was saying felt that he'd said something wrong. There was a pause you could cut with a knife.

'I see, Bob,' she said bitterly. 'And of course, ever since I came into this house, I've hated you and tried to injure you.'

'You didn't,' he cried passionately. 'Now, I never said that. Really, mother, I didn't.'

'God forgive your mummy anyway, Bob,' she said in a low voice.

Then I heard Mr. Desmond's step in the hall and was suddenly overwhelmed by an appalling sense of my own guilt. I knew I had been listening to something I should never have heard. I thought I must have made some stir, and that he was coming out to see who was the spy, so I took to my heels and bolted up the avenue like mad. At the top I glanced back and stopped. He was going off in the other direction, towards the open country. He hadn't even seen me. Probably he hadn't seen much else either, poor devil!



# SEAN JENNETT



## Sonnet

My roots are dead. In this blank world I fall,  
a stripped trunk into the rush of time,  
eyeless in God, tongueless to a rhyme,  
a mock of tongues, my own deaf, dumb fool:

in winter's glass prism locked, spring's flood  
sucked through, or summer's surly river  
riding half-under—no romantic rover—  
thrust forth by force that swells the living bud.

Let no such tide drag at my heels. I have  
an ocean in my blood that drums  
this girdered continent my flesh awake.  
Now flat and calm, no winds, a silent lake:  
raise there, O God, tempests and rough storms,  
no care how keen, and lightnings of love.

# TERESA DEEVY



## Strange Birth

### A ONE-ACT PLAY

*SCENE: The hall of Mrs. Taylor's house—19, Mountain View Road. The hall door, which is closed, is centre back. At the right side two doors; at the left a curtained archway, showing the stairs: the stairway leads both up and down.*

*It is a Summer morning, about eight o'clock.*

*When the curtain rises, Sara Meade is working in the hall, polishing the linoleum. About thirty years of age, strongly built, somewhat ungainly of movement, she glows with happy energy and goes at her work with heavy goodwill.*

*A postman's knock: some letters fall into the box, and from it on to the floor. Sara swoops over and seizes them. She stands for a moment close to the hall door, listening, as though to make sure there is no one outside—or rather that the postman's steps are receding. Then, having carefully examined the envelopes, with a headshake over one, a smile over another, she places three of them on the hall table, and, with one in hand goes to one of the doors on the right—the one nearer to the hall door. Here she hesitates, listening again, as for a movement inside. Turning from the door she leaves this letter also on the table, takes her mop, and re-starts work, humming softly.*

*A moment later this door opens and a tall, grey-haired woman comes into the hall. She wears dressing-gown and bedroom slippers.*

SARA: Well, Mrs. Taylor—out of bed so early!

MRS. TAYLOR: I thought there might be a letter.

SARA: I was full sure you were dozing or I'd bring it in. *(She pounces on the letter and brings it to Mrs. Taylor.)*

MRS. TAYLOR: Sara, my son . . .

SARA: Ah, I was thinking . . .

MRS. TAYLOR: My glasses . . . my glasses . . . (*excited, shaking.*)

SARA: I'll get them for you. (*Rushes into Mrs. Taylor's room, and returns with the glasses.*) I'll put on the kettle. (*Disappears into the other room. Mrs. Taylor stands in the centre of the hall, reading. Sara re-appears.*) I have it plugged in.

MRS. TAYLOR: Sara, he's coming . . . safe home again . . .

SARA: That's the best ever.

MRS. TAYLOR: Out of all danger.

SARA: Hooray for the day. Get back to bed now, and read for yourself, and I'll bring you in a cup of tea.

MRS. TAYLOR: Back to bed! I'll be up and about. I'm a different woman.

SARA: Good so, you are. This will be the making of you. We'll have the place grand. We'll put up the new curtains.

MRS. TAYLOR: Yes, and settle the blind (*shaky*).

SARA: I'll give the room a great doing. What time will he come?

MRS. TAYLOR: Some time in the evening—that's all he said.

SARA: Out of the draught now, Mrs. Taylor (*bringing her to the door*).

MRS. TAYLOR: You're a good girl. Sara, those months when I was frightened for him . . . terrified and worried . . . I'd never have got through the Winter without you.

SARA: What did I do? Will you tell me that? (*Smilingly matter-of-fact.*)

MRS. TAYLOR: You to talk to . . . so much comfort.

SARA: Mr. Bassett will be coming down for his letters,—it wouldn't do,—you to be here. (*Gets her into her room.*) That's right, now, I have the tray ready. (*Shuts the door, and again goes to work. Suddenly she stops and listens,—her hand pressed to her heart. The hall door is opened from the outside: a young man comes in, putting his latch-key into his pocket.*)

SARA: Well Mr. Bassett, you're out early!

MR. BASSETT: Yes, the early worm, don't you know.

IRISH WRITING

SARA: I couldn't think for my life who was opening the door.

MR. BASSETT: Bad for the heart, isn't it, life and all that. Any letters?

SARA: Not the right one. (*Gently: she has ceased work, and is watching him.*)

MR. BASSETT: Are these all the letters? (*With keen disappointment. Sara nods slowly and with sympathy.*)

SARA: Maybe, Mr. Bassett, by the second post.

MR. BASSETT: No! She won't write me now, ever again. Why doesn't she? Can you understand it—from what I told you?

SARA: What understanding would I have—the likes of me?

MR. BASSETT: I think you have—you've more than . . . . some. (*A silence.*) If she'd write—no matter what—

SARA: Take it square on the jaw, Mr. Bassett.

MR. BASSETT: I'm not a whinger.

SARA: Indeed you're not. I often thought how brave you were, when you'd be telling me all about her, and the bad times you'd be having.

MR. BASSETT: Will the Taylor lady mind if I loiter . . . . it's lonesome above . . . . (*Lights a cigarette for himself.*)

SARA: She'll mind nothing this morning: her son's coming home. Her world goes round him . . . . Isn't it terrible and awful to be that way?

MR. BASSETT: Will you have a fag, Sara?

SARA: I couldn't smoke here.

MR. BASSETT: Keep it for this evening. (*Tosses one to her; it falls on the floor. Sara picks it up eagerly and stores it away safely.*) Why I was out so early this morning—my mother's wedding.

SARA: Her wedding? This morning?

MR. BASSETT: Oh, she was married before I was born, very good and all of that. Twenty-five years ago to-day; she'd have me make it a great occasion, out for Mass, and I'm to meet my fate this morning, so she said—that's why I was hoping—(*breaks off, glances towards the letters.*)



SARA: You had a right to tell me all this sooner (*rallying him.*)  
I'd have it broadcast up the road that you'd be out.  
There'd be plenty of early birds on the wing.

MR. BASSETT: All but the right one . . . Ah, good morning,  
Mrs. Stims. (*For at this moment Mrs. Stims comes  
through the archway. She is a small, fair, washed-out  
woman of forty: shabbily dressed, very tidy, wears  
glasses: she has come up the stairs from the garden flat.*)

MRS. STIMS: Is this what you're employed for, Sara,—talking  
to people in the hall? (*Without even glancing at Mr.  
Bassett.*)

MR. BASSETT: I beg your pardon—isn't that a matter for  
Mrs. Taylor?

MRS. STIMS: I beg your pardon—mind your business.

SARA: There's the kettle—her tea! (*Disappears.*)

MRS. STIMS: I suppose there are no letters for me. Yes, two  
—but she couldn't be bothered bringing them down:  
no, she's much too busy. Oh, she has far too much on  
hands.

MR. BASSETT: Is that part of her job—to bring down your  
letters?

MRS. STIMS: She's an ignorant girl, awkward and rough: a  
bossy young woman. She ought to be sent away from  
here.

MR. BASSETT: That's an idea. (*Turns and goes slowly up the  
stairs, whistling. Mrs. Stims stands at the hall table,  
opens her letters and glances over them: then she looks  
up, looks slowly about the hall.*)

MRS. STIMS (*to herself*): Empty—the minute I come up: no  
one wants me. (*Sara re-appears carrying a tray from  
the back room into Mrs. Taylor. Mrs. Stims, seeing  
her, turns her back, and pretends to be engrossed in  
her letters. When Sara goes, she looks round again—  
crushes one of the letters angrily, and throws them both  
on the table, then pushes up her glasses and presses  
her fingers to her eyes.*)

SARA (*Coming into the hall.*): Is there good word in it?  
(*Eager.*)

MRS. STIMS: Thank you for bringing down my letters. (*Frigid.*)

IRISH WRITING

SARA: Oh—I might have indeed . . . I might easily have . . .  
Is it good news for you, Mrs. Stims?

MRS. STIMS: That's my private affair, my correspondence.

SARA: But you were telling me . . .

MRS. STIMS: I'll tell you more when I see fit . . . A girl gone quite beyond her station . . . . (*Silence. Mrs. Stims goes, Sara looks after her for a moment, then takes the mop, about to start work again. A knock: she springs to the door, all eagerness: waits for a moment, glowing. Another knock: Sara opens the door. The postman is seen: he steps into the hall. He is medium size, and at first glance seems nondescript, but when he speaks we are aware of a quiet forcefulness altogether out of the ordinary.*)

SARA: Oh, Bill-the-post,—and you coming in. (*With a laugh which is almost a guffaw: her attitude towards him is one of amusement, unconsciously adopted, perhaps, to hide a glowing excitement in his presence.*)

BILL: Shut the door for a minute . . . (*Sara laughs again, shuts the door and turns to him.*)

SARA: And what is it now?

BILL (*Very serious*): I've a letter here for Mrs. Kirwan. Would there be a Mrs. Kirwan in this house?

SARA: There is not.

BILL: No, I thought not.

SARA: Would it be for Mr. Bassett?

BILL: Kirwan . . . Kirwan . . . number 19—that's your number.

SARA: Then it must be for Mrs. Stims.

BILL: Sara, don't be talking nonsense.

SARA (*A little wildly*): Well Mr. Bassett is above and Mrs. Stims is down below and Mrs. Taylor on this floor, and that's all the Christian people in this house.

BILL: Besides yourself.

SARA: Do I live here, Bill-the-post?

BILL: Don't you come here daily working?

SARA: Sara Meade—if you could make a Mrs. Kirwan out of that . . . .

BILL: It might be made . . . It might very well be. (*An*

*instant of silence.*) Will I leave it here on the table till someone will claim it?

SARA: And I'll mark it 'not known' and throw it into the pillar beyond.

BILL: What matter but there's something worth reading in that letter.

SARA: How could you know?

BILL: I have knowledge.

SARA (*A little nervous*): Why couldn't you drop it in the box, and save me the time and all this trouble?

BILL: Sure I wouldn't see you then, and how could I face the live-long day if I didn't see you in the morning?

SARA: Phew-ew! A postman too—one of the government—an oldish man.

BILL: You're no chicken yourself, you must be thirty.

SARA: I was thirty-one last week.

BILL: Sara! Don't say it . . . you'd want to look round.

SARA: I spent my whole time looking round, and wasn't able to find a fellow to suit me.

BILL: Ah-h . . . the pity of it . . . We're all the same, and the world full of men and women. It is like the sorting out of letters. I was in that department once, you know.

SARA: I'm sure you were.

BILL: Why are you sure? What do you infer by that?

SARA: Nothing at all—only to say what's expected.

BILL: A foolish habit. (*Severely: then, gently—*) I am watching you a long time now, you might have noticed.

SARA: (*With a guffaw.*) A knock at the door every morning, and for no reason.

BILL: What will we do about this letter?

SARA: Unless you'd alter the name you have on it.

BILL: Now I can see you understand me.

SARA: Bill, you're a knotty question.

BILL: A good sensible girl, with a happy heart, a good steady worker: the sort of girl to make a man happy.

SARA: Won't the people be waiting for their letters?

BILL: I am on the return journey.

SARA: Oh, you would.

IRISH WRITING

BILL: You'd be my choice . . . if I'd be yours.

SARA: I would?

BILL: You would. You are the girl of my desire. My world lies at your two feet.

SARA: No! don't! (*Steps back as though struck. Then, nervously—*) Would love be born from hearing that?

BILL: I couldn't venture any opinion. (*With his amazing restraint*).

SARA: I wouldn't like that it would happen: (*Low, fumbling*). To be caught up with this loving business: I'd be afraid: it might give you a fearful time.

BILL: Will you read this letter! (*Passionate*).

SARA: Bill Kirwan, why did you put your own name on it! (*They are crying to one another now*).

BILL: It will be yours——

SARA: I'm leaving here—(*Wildly, turning from him*).

BILL: When did you make this decision?

SARA: Only this minute. I'll give Mrs. Taylor my month's notice.

BILL: She'll regret it.

SARA: So will I . . . 'Sensible, happy'—what you call me. It would surprise you, Bill, how happy you'd be washing and cleaning and shining the brasses, and watching one day follow another . . . But all the people in this house—they're someway suffering, and by love . . . There's nothing left in Mrs. Stims, who's down below, only vinegar,—that's all, because of someone she was fond of . . . 'Twould terrify you. I think I'm better not to have it.

BILL: Sensible, happy, comfortable coward!

SARA: Well maybe I am. I'd be afraid of my life now, so I would.

BILL: We'll tear this up. (*The letter*).

SARA: Don't tear it yet . . . I'd like to see.

BILL: You won't see till you're ready to call yourself Mrs. Kirwan.

SARA: Yes,—but I'm ready. I am ready all the time—if you and I came to an agreement. I only ask that you won't go waking love in me.



BILL: I won't marry without love at all. There's girls without end that I could have—hundreds of them.

SARA (*Groaning*): I am losing all my comfort . . . Oh, Mrs. Taylor . . . (*with relief, seeing Mrs. Taylor come out of her room. Mrs. Taylor, now very much younger in appearance, is dressed in outdoor things and carries a shopping basket.*)

MRS. TAYLOR: What's it now? (*Gaily*). Have you told Bill he brought me the best of news?

SARA: No, I didn't. (*Dully*). I forgot to tell him.

MRS. TAYLOR (*To Bill*): Twenty years have fallen off me. My boy's coming home this evening. You brought the letter.

BILL: I'm very glad.

MRS. TAYLOR: I'm going now for the fatted calf. (*She opens the hall door*). What a lovely morning. (*Turns to Sara*). There's nothing like a Summer morning.

SARA (*In hard tones*): Mr. Bassett couldn't bear sometimes that the sun would be shining.

MRS. TAYLOR: Bunkum and rubbish! He's very young. (*Turns to Bill*): I suppose you called to ask Sara a question.

BILL: That might be. (*Mrs. Taylor laughs, and goes, leaving the door open: the tree-lined road in view is flooded with sun*).

SARA: I'd have laughed before when she'd say that,—but now I couldn't laugh at all. Isn't that a bad sign for me?

BILL: I'll tear this up—you couldn't read it.

SARA: But . . . (*with sudden resolve she springs at him*). Give it to me! . . . (*Seizes the letter*).

BILL: Did I give it . . . or did you take it? (*Sara, arms crossed on breast, the letter clasped tightly in one hand, stands facing him*).

SARA: Tell it to me—what you said.

BILL: I said you were a mine of wisdom.

SARA: Get along—(*a happy laugh*).

BILL: I said I didn't know you yet.

SARA: And you don't either. (*Slightly troubled*).

BILL: But that I knew you're the mine I could dig in for ever.

SARA: That was queer.

IRISH WRITING

BILL: I said you had nature,—kindness and depth in your easy ways, and that you were happy.

SARA: If you shut the door, Bill, we could have a kiss.

BILL: But then you'd be destroyed entirely, since I'm not going to marry you. (*An instant of silence*).

SARA: For a minute that went stabbing through me. I knew this is the way I'd be if love got born.

BILL: 'Got born'—you fool! (*Roughly catching her wrist, and drawing her arm downwards,—uncrossing the arms*). You have loved me for a long time past. I have seen it often in your eyes.

SARA: I think you're right. I didn't know. (*With great gentleness*). Now I'll keep a hold on it always.

BILL: I'll leave you now because I'm late, and I won't ask you to marry me—until to-morrow. You were too slow in the beginning: I'll come back to-morrow morning. (*She smiles at him with the same gentleness: he turns away, goes out*).

SARA: Don't shut the door . . . (*A movement towards the door, but he has drawn it out: she turns back, sits down on the hall chair, her arms crossed again as though hugging to herself a treasure,—the envelope held tightly in one hand. Mr. Bassett comes quickly through the archway, hurrying out to his day's work: at the hall door he stands for a moment, looks at Sara.*)

MR. BASSETT: All the same, Sara, wasn't she heartless . . .

SARA: What matter . . . what matter . . . (*Quietly*) . . . you have something.

(*He looks at her, puzzled, then giving it up, hurries out*).

C U R T A I N .

# ROBERT FARREN

## The Cool Gold Wines of Paradise

The God who had such heart for us  
as made Him leave His house,  
come down through archipelagos  
of stars, and live with us  
has such a store of joys laid down  
their savours will not sour:  
the cool, gold wines of Paradise,  
the bread of Heaven's flour:

He'll meet the soul which comes in love  
And deal it joy on joy—  
as once He dealt out star on star  
to garrison the sky,  
to stand there over rains and snows  
and deck the dark of night—  
so, God will deal the soul, like stars,  
delight upon delight.

Night skies have planet-armies, still  
the blue is never full;  
rich, massive stars have never bowed  
one cloud-bed's flock of wool;  
red worlds of dreadful molten fire  
have singed no speck of air:—  
all is in place, and, each to each,  
God's creatures show His care.

The soul will take each joy He deals  
as skies take star on star,  
be never filled, -be never bowed,  
be airy, as clouds are,  
burn with enlarging heat and shine  
with ever-brightening ray,  
joyful and gathering thirst for joy  
throughout Unending Day.

# LIAM O'FLAHERTY



## The Touch

A WHITE mare galloped west along the strand against the fierce Spring wind. Her tail was stretched out stiff and motionless. Flecks of foam dropped from her jaws with each out-rush of her breath. Her wide-open nostrils were blood red. Hailstones, carried slant-wise at a great speed by the wind's power, struck with a loud noise against the canvas of her straddle. Two horse-hair ropes trailed low from the holed bottoms of her wicker panniers, which flapped with her heaving gait, their halters whining as they shifted round the pegs of the straddle's wooden yoke. The wind tore loose wisps from the layer of straw that cushioned her back against the rough canvas. The wisps were maintained afloat upon the air by the sweeping blast. They sailed away to the east, in a straggling line, frolicking like butterflies at dance.

Cáit Phaudeen Pheadair, a girl of eighteen, sat sideways on the mare's haunches, crouching forward over the straddle yoke. She gripped one of the upright pegs with her mittened left hand. A can of hot tea, bundled up in a woollen cloth, was held aloft in her right hand. She wore a heavy dress of purple frieze, a sheepskin jacket, rawhide shoes and a head shawl that was knitted under her chin. Her blue eyes were half-closed for protection against the stinging hail. She rode with skill, in complete union with the movement of the mare.

Over at the western end of the strand, the people of the district had been gathering drift weed from the surf since a long time before dawn. Now there were many cocks of the red weed scattered over the grey sand, up from the curving limit of the breaking waves.

Nearly all the men stopped working when they saw the girl come riding towards them on the white mare at a fierce gallop.



"There is a virgin that is fit partner for a king," one man said.

"By the blade of the lance!" said a second man. "If I were single to-day, it would be on her finger I'd want to put my ring."

"Aye," said a third, "and in her womb my son."

A young man named Bartla Choilm Brighde was working for Cáit's father as a day labourer that Spring. He flushed with anger on hearing these remarks. He was in love with the girl.

"Loose-mouthed devils!" he muttered under his breath, as he came out of the tide with a load of seaweed on his pitch fork. "May the swine be maimed and gouged! I'd like to choke them all."

He glanced towards the girl furtively as he threw the weed from his pitch fork onto the cock. Then he hurried back into the sea for another load. He was anxious to conceal his emotion from the other men. He was chilled to the marrows of his bones after wading back and forth through the icy water for many hours. His hands and feet were numbed. His thighs were scalded. Yet the intensity of his love for the girl made him feel there was a warm fire burning within him. His blood was coursing madly through his veins.

The girl deftly brought the mare to an abrupt halt near her father's gathered weed. Then she leaped to the sand, still holding aloft her can of hot tea.

"God bless the work," she called out gaily to the people.

"You, too," they answered her.

Her father, Paudeen Pheadair Reamoinn, came over in a state of great anger. He was a stooped little man. His crabbed features were distorted by the cold. He was about sixty. His wife had given him no sons. His daughters, with the exception of Cáit, had all emigrated in search of a livelihood. That was why he was obliged to take a labouring man to help him with the sowing that Spring.

"Are you crazy?" he said, catching the mare by the head.

"Why so?" said Cáit.

"For racing this one west along the strand," he said. "That's the reason."

Cáit laughed. She was much taller than her father, a splendid supple girl with the exuberance of health in her wild countenance.

"I couldn't hold her," she said. "It must have been the

## IRISH WRITING

Spring she felt in her blood. She wanted no part of quick-walking or trotting. She only wanted to gallop. There is no end to her courage, even though she is only a little one."

"You are sillier than your mother," Pauden said. "God help me, having to deal with the two of ye."

He loosened the belly-band and put his hand in between the straw and the mare's back.

"Aie!" he said. "She's half drowned in her own sweat."

The mare shuddered when she felt the coldness of his hand touching her heated skin.

"Aie!" Pauden said again. "A silly girl racing this poor creature that's as fat as a pig after her winter's idleness."

Cáit laughed again as she walked over to a big granite rock.

"Ara! That's fool's talk," she said. "That race will only do her good."

Pauden put the padded tail-piece outside the mare's tail. Then he moved the straddle from side to side, in order to air her heated back. When she began to shiver violently, he returned the tail-piece and half-tightened the belly-band.

"Aie!" he said mournfully. "Woe to him who is without a son to tend horses."

He put a small basket full of hay to the mare's head. He took a handful of straw from the straddle and began to rub her legs.

"Aie!" he repeated. "A man is cursed truly, when he has only a female to guide his horse."

Cáit took shelter under the rock and loosened her sheepskin jacket. Her apron was wound around her waist beneath it. She loosened the apron also and spread the bundle it contained upon the sand. There were large slices of buttered griddle cake, boiled eggs, salt, two spoons and two mugs. When she had everything arranged, she unwound a cloth from the can of tea. She opened the can and poured hot tea into the mugs.

"Come on over now," she shouted at the two men. "Drink this warm sup. Don't let it get cold."

Bartla hurried over to the rock. He sat down on his heels, took off his cap and made the sign of the cross on his forehead. Cáit handed him a mug.

"God increase you," he said as he accepted it.

"Same to you," she said.

They looked one another in the eyes. They blushed. Even though the few words they had spoken were those of common courtesy, they got as shy as if they had disclosed the secret of their love. Cáit looked away suddenly. Bartla bent over his food.

Paudeen came over to the rock, blowing on his cupped hands.

"Go on over and catch hold of her head," he said to Cáit, "for fear she might take fright. She's as wild as the devil on account of the cold."

He sat down on the sand and put his legs cross-wise under him. He blessed himself hurriedly and began to eat. He bolted his food like a person half-dead from hunger.

"Lord God!" Cáit said as she handed him a mug of tea. "Why don't you have patience with your bite?"

"Bad cess to you!" Paudeen said. "Clear off over there."

Cáit went to the mare and began to rub her forehead. Another shower of hailstones was now falling. The mare was trying to pull her halter. She was very excited.

"Easy now, treasure," Cáit whispered to her. "Take it easy, darling. Preoil! My little hag!"

The mare soon lowered her snout to the hay once more, as she grew quiet under the touch of the girl's gentle hand.

"Hurry up there," Paudeen said to Bartla. "Poor people can't take the whole day with their meal. Hurry, I say. We have a lot to do and the day is nearly spent already."

The young man did not speak. Although he had felt faint from hunger for two hours previously, he was unable to eat more than a few morsels. He found difficulty in swallowing even that little. Hunger left him when he saw the holy light of love in Cáit's eyes as they looked at one another.

Every other time she looked at him, he had only seen the gay light of mockery in her eyes. Every other time, her lips smiled when she looked at him. This time her lips did not smile. They had frowned in wonder and awe.

That was why his hunger left him. That was why his throat contracted, making it difficult to swallow. So that, instead of eating, he kept looking back furtively over his shoulder in her direction.

The father soon noticed these furtive glances that the young labourer cast in the direction of his daughter. His anger blazed.

"They say a cat is entitled to look at a princess," he said. "That may be, but it is certain that a boorish land-slave has no such right. The worthless land-slave has no right in the world to look at the daughter of an honourable free-man. Do you understand what I'm saying, son of Colm Brighde?"

The young man's anger blazed. He looked sharply at Paudéen. There was no outward sign of his anger in any part of his countenance except in his eyes, which shone fiercely. He did not speak.

"Watch out for yourself, I say," the old man continued. "You have only a small garden by the door of your cottage, two goats and an ass. You have neither father, nor brother, nor sister. You have only your mother and she is sick for the past ten years and she is depending on you like a new-born infant for every little service. Nobody belonging to you ever had land or fore-shore in this district. They were only rogues and vagrants, stray people that were driven to our place by the famine long ago."

Bartla jumped to his feet. His hands were trembling with rage.

"You have said enough, son of Peadar Reamoinn," he cried. "There was never a rogue of my kindred. Only honest, God-fearing people belong to my kindred."

"Devil a bit I care," said Paudéen. "Stay clear of my daughter. It's not on a girl that was born in a house of two cows that a man of two goats should cast eyes."

"You have said enough, old man," Bartla repeated.

"Clear off, then," Paudéen said. "If you have eaten, go on over and be loading weed."

Bartla rushed over to the mare. He pushed aside one of the baskets with his shoulder and tightened the belly-band fiercely. Then he began to load seaweed into the two baskets. When they were full to overflowing, he picked up his fork and continued to load the weed onto the top of the straddle.

Cáit's heart now beat wildly as she watched the young man. The fierce movement of his labouring strength made her intoxicated. She had to lean against the mare's shoulder, with dazed eyes and open lips. Even though hailstones were still falling and striking sharply against the side of her face, she was



unaware of their bitter touch. She was only aware of the desire that possessed her heart and soul.

Paudeen noticed her pre-possession as he came over from the rock. He understood at once. He halted with his back to the shower. He rubbed his chin with his thumb and forefinger.

"There now!" said he to himself. "That young scoundrel has got hold of her. There now!"

He looked at Bartla. Now he hated the young man bitterly. He hated the young back that was as straight as an oar. He hated the fair hair and the shining blue eyes that were able to drive women to folly with desire.

"Damn him," he said with venom. "The beggar! The devil of a beggar! Without a penny piece in his pocket! The beggar! I'll soon put an end to his shaping. The stinking fellow!"

He went to the mare and caught up his pitch fork. He began to load seaweed. The two men worked fiercely, one on each side of the mare. The weed was soon heaped high above the straddle in a tower. It was time to throw the first rope.

"Look out for the rope," Paudeen said.

"Let me have it," said Bartla.

Paudeen threw the rope across the top of the load.

"Got it?" he said to Bartla.

The wind blew the rope end out ahead. It fell across Cáit's bosom. She caught it and handed it to Bartla.

"Did you get it?" Paudeen called again.

Bartla made no answer. When he was taking the rope end from Cáit, his fingers touched the back of her hand. The two of them started as a result of the touch. They became dizzy. They let go their hold of the rope end. They seized one another by the hands. They stood breast to breast. They trembled from head to foot. Their faces were ablaze.

They remained standing breast to breast like that, touching, for several moments. Then Paudeen screamed.

"What the devil ails you, scoundrel?" he yelled. "Why don't you speak?"

Bartla started. He dropped Cáit's hands, picked up the rope end and tied it around a tooth that projected from the bottom of the basket. Then he threw across the second rope.

"Here it comes," he cried.

Paudeen caught the second rope and tied it around the tooth.

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When he had his knee against the side of the basket, tightening the rope, the mare let one of her hind legs go dead. The load became unbalanced. It almost fell on top of the old man.

"Stand!" Bartla yelled, as he kicked the mare in the shin.

She returned her weight to the defaulting leg and the load righted itself at once.

"You're alright now," Bartla said to Paudeen. "You can fasten."

Paudeen secured the rope and then he ran over to Bartla's side, his teeth chattering with rage.

"You devil!" he cried. "Were you trying to kill me?"

"It wasn't my fault," Bartla said. "It was how she let her foot go dead."

"You're a dirty scoundrel. There was a day when I'd . . ."

"You've said enough," Bartla said.

"Scoundrel!" Paudeen said. "Rogue!"

"Shut up," Bartla said. "Don't say anything you might regret, if I were to lose patience with you."

Paudeen went over to his own side of the mare, boasting as he went.

"There was a day," he cried, "when I'd chastise the best men in the place, if they dared insult me."

"I don't hear you," Bartla said.

The young man and Cáit looked at one another. Now there was terror in their eyes and despair. They both understood that there was a chasm, which could not be bridged, standing between them and their love. Bartla stretched out his hand and touched her lightly on the shoulder. Overcome with emotion, she turned away from him and sobbed. She hid her face in the mare's white mane and her whole body shook as she wept. Bartla took his pitch fork and began to work fiercely once more.

The two men loaded seaweed and threw ropes and tightened until there was as much seaweed above the straddle as the mare could carry. The load was like a wet red tower.

"Be off now," Paudeen said sharply to the young man.

"Hurry. We have at least ten loads to bring to the potato garden."

Bartla took the halter from Cáit. Now they did not look at one another. He twisted the halter around his left hand, with which he then took hold of the load. He picked up a sea-rod from the cock.

"Go on!" he cried to the mare, flashing the sea-rod by her head. "Twous!"

The mare went forward slowly, up the strand through the cocks of gathered weed, her feet sinking deep into the soft sand under the heavy load.

"Go on!" Bartla kept shouting angrily, as he shook the sea-rod at her head.

They mounted the slope, onto the sand bank that bound the road, a red tower walking on long white feet and a young man guiding it.

Cáit went over to the rock and knelt beside the remains of the meal. Then she watched Bartla with longing until he went from sight. Darkness fell upon her soul when he disappeared beyond the sand bank, just as if she would never see him again. Indeed, she knew that she had just suffered an eternal loss. When she tried to pick up the gear, she discovered that she was unable to lift the lightest object. She had to lower her head on her bosom and give way once more to her tears.

Paudeen also stood looking after the young man until he was out of sight. The old man was talking to himself and there was an evil expression on his countenance.

"There now!" he was saying. "Nice kettle of fish. A dirty beggar planning to come into my house as son-in-law. I'll soon put an end to his foolish ideas. The beggar!"

He went east along the strand to the place where Marcus Joyce was working.

"Listen," he said to Marcus.

Marcus was a big strong man with a head of red hair. He and Paudeen took shelter under a cock of weed, both of them sitting on their heels. They lighted a pipe.

"You were talking of a match a short while ago," Paudeen said.

"I was," said Marcus. "I was thinking of that second son I have, Red Mike."

"A good man, God bless him," Paudeen said. "I've no fault with him at all, but with the amount of money you intended to give him and he getting a lovely girl as well as two-fourths of land."

"Faith two hundred and fifty is no trifle," Marcus said.

"Put another hundred with it," Paudeen said, "and that makings of a bull you have. The yearling."

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"Oh! You devil!" Marcus said. "Where would I get that riches?"

"Listen, Marcus," Pauden said. "Whisper. You have half a score of Roscommon sheep and . . ."

When Cáit had wept a little she was able to gather up her belongings. She tied the bundle under her jacket and then looked round for her father. When she saw him in earnest conversation with Marcus Joyce, under the cock of seaweed, she took great fright. She made the sign of the cross on her lips.

"God between me and misfortune!" she said earnestly.

She knew well that they spoke of a match between her and Red Mike. She also knew that the match was practically settled, judging by their gestures. The two men were striking one another's palms forcefully and shouldering one another and passing the pipe after every few words. These were indications that the bargain was already concluded, except for minor details.

"Oh! Lord God!" Cáit said to herself, as she hurried east along the strand towards her home. "The damage is done. He has sold me to Red Mike Joyce, just as if I were a cow or a sheep."

She mounted the sand bank and then went south along the narrow road that led to her village. Another great shower of hailstones came. She took shelter under the fence that bound the road. She sat on the ground, with her back to the fence, a finger between her teeth, staring at the ground, with her mind a blank. Then she suddenly thought of Bartla. She started, just as if she had been struck. Her eyes opened wide and she stared at the opposite fence.

At first she thought of his hands touching her hands and of his bosom touching her bosom. She thought of the intoxication produced in her being by that touch.

Then the suffering of eternal hell came upon her with the memory of that touch, for it was manifest to her that this first touch of love would be her last.

A wail of despair came to her throat, but it went no farther up into her mouth. She only stared in silence at the far fence and at the cold hailstones that lashed against the cold grey stones.

Aie! Aie! Hailstones! Cold hailstones and a young girl staring without tears at her still-born love.



## PATRICK KAVANAGH

### 'Through the Open Door . . . .'

Through the open door the hum of rosaries  
Came out and blended with the homing bees.

The trees

Heard nothing stranger than the rain or the wind  
Or the birds——  
But deep in their roots they knew a seed had sinned.

In the graveyard a goat was nibbling at a yew,  
The cobbler's chickens with anxious looks  
Were stragg'ling home through nettles, over graves.  
A young girl down a hill was driving cows  
To a corner at the gable-end of a roofless house.

Cows were milked earlier,  
The supper hurried,  
Hens shut in,  
Horses unyoked,  
And three men shaving before the same mirror.

The trip of iron tips on tile  
Hesitated up the middle aisle,  
Heads that were bowed glanced up to see  
Who could this last arrival be.

Murmur of women's voices from the porch,  
Memories of relations in the graveyard.  
On the stem  
Of memory imaginations blossom.

In the dim  
Corners in the side seats faces gather,  
Lit up now and then by a guttering candle  
And the ghost of day at the window.

A secret lover is saying  
Three Hail Marys that she who knows  
The ways of women will bring  
Cathleen O'Hara (he names her) home to him.  
Irony fate! Cathleen herself is saying  
Three Hail Marys to her who knows  
The ways of men will bring  
Somebody else home to her——  
"O may he love me."  
What is the Virgin Mary now to do?

The above lines are taken from a poem *Father Mat.*



## BILL NAUGHTON

### Night Out With Lannigan

THIS LANNIGAN, he was a proper '*san fairy ann*' bloke. Oh, the jobs he'd done, before he 'came ambulance driver. You'd never credit it—a chap getting around the way Lannigan had. I suppose his folk had started him out in life as an Irishman, but seven years in the House Cavalry and his brogue was shafted with army Cockney.

Most nights he'd be telling me, when we were stand-by duty and I was his mate, he'd be telling me about his capers.

"Murderers—" I've heard him start off, "keeping observation on nine murderers I was—an' didn't know it. Dixon Prison, bloke by the name of Apps, a Major Apps, he gave me the job. I thought they were 18B men. Didn't know from Adam that they were up for the big jump. Yetts, a night warder, he gave me the wire as to what I was watching over. I'd a sheet, see, with all their monnikers on it. Well, I'm on night observation, and when this Yetts comes along we go a bit of a chat, and I just asks him, 'What's the old C.C. stand for aside each of these names?'

"'Blime me,' says he, 'don't yer know? Don't yer know C.C. stands for Capital Crime? murder, see? What you got here is a bunch a-waiting trial. See across there—' he says, pointing, 'see the curly-headed guy? yay, the blonde one—that's Triggs. Done at least seven women in, he has. No, he can't hear us, he's dead a-sleeping. Look at him, away deep an' happy,' says Yetts, 'with a face more innocent than a babe's. His old woman it was, rumbled him. Neighbour came in to borrow the can-opener, see, of an evening. She couldn't find it. Now, what she told me was, that she wouldn't have given it a second thought, only she'd used it at teatime. Funny

thing, it turns up next morning. So, she keeps her lamps on me laddo there—more curiosity than anything. An' she soon gets wide to him fiddling it out with him at night. One thing leads to another an' there y'are. Yay, at the very least, he's done seven in. Queer, ain' it, an' him having them nice pinky cheeks, too,' says this Yetts bloke.

"Funny thing," Lannigan goes on, "but you wouldn't believe what nice fellas they are—the regular run of murderers—when you get to know them for themselves. No kiddin', I used to get on something lovely with them, all except for one cowson who wouldn't wash. He'd shot two cops, mind you, but the way he used to lead off, howling and blubbering, when I made to wash the scruff of his neck!

"Yay, I found there's something nice about murderers, and it's something non-murderers don't have. It's a kind of innocence, if you will—like what a kid has who thinks he's artful, an' you can see through it the whole time. Why, I used to listen 'em talking away amongst themselves:

" 'Think they'll send my body to T'ronto when I've swung?' one bloke asks.

" 'Body! body! ha, ha, ha . . . that's bleedin' rich, that is! ' they yell at him, 'Lookyer mate, your body ain't goin' to be the size of that little finger, when they done with it! '

" 'Holy, that's gonna be awkward,' mutters the old Canuck, 'I sure was reck'nin' on the body goin' back T'ronto ways. I can see I ain't gonna be happy as I figured.' Came up my desk twice that night for the bromide. He couldn't sleep.

"An' the sort of humour they got in them places:

"Couple of lags, I had 'em handy in case any of these blokes should turn nasty. Nice chaps, too, the lags. Company directors, put down for seven stretch on account of a pepper swindle they'd organised. Never had need of their services, but I liked 'em around. They used to work a wangle with the cigarettes for their mates inside.

"Now, there's one of my bunch, Jock, sergeant, K.R.R.'s, up for crackin' a fella in a four-ale bar down Whitechapel. Turns out he's one of these china-skulled wallahs, this fella, manager of a pawnbroker's business. Jock takes a swipe at him—he was a proper 'no-sooner-a-word-then-a-blow' bloke—an' down against the counter the pawnbroker falls. It was



something to do with someone supping the wrong ale. But his skull cracks, being on the brittle side, see? Well, it's this same Jock I hears asks one of the lags for a cig:

" 'I must ask for your promise to give it back,' says the lag.

" 'Ye'll no think I'm one that 'ood run away for a fag?' says Jock, flaming up.

" 'Listen,' says the lag, 'I don't think anything. But the last man to ask me for a smoke was Kingbow. I said to Kingbow, what I'm saying to you now: "Kingbow," I says, "you'll be sure to give it me back?" And he says, "'Course, I'll give it you back!" And I says, "If you don't, Kingbow—you'll *swing* for it!" Listen, Jock: Kingbow never returned that cigarette. And everybody knows what happened to Kingbow . . . . don't they, Jock? So, here y'are, I'll lend you a cig, but you won't forget, will you, Jock . . . ?' "

This Lannigan, he'd so many ways of pulling faces, so much changing of voice, that he was just like a one-man character play before you. And, against your judgment, you'd find yourself stuck listening him all the night.

"Turn it in, Lannigan!" I'd have to cry. "I'm just an ordinary fellow," I'd tell him, "none of that sort of lark ever happened me. You're getting me as I can't shut my eyes at night, without I see things. I can't bear being in the house alone. I can't stand it, Lanny, the way you tell them tales."

The trouble was this: I'd weighed up all the people I knew—as a matter of speaking. I mean I'm quick at sizing anyone up; and so on, I'd got them all nicely taped. And, having read more than a few books, about life an' that, I'm sitting there with my own little batch of humanity nicely cut an' dried. Very comfortable in my opinions I am, when along comes a bloke like Lannigan. He tells me about men, decent chaps, too, who hand their cigarettes around, wear pyjamas, have fathers and mothers, same as anyone else—an' kids, too, come to that—and then, on their nights out, they go an' cut women up. And others, he tells me, who do worse. That sort of thing is a shock to a bloke. And with me, it got me watching sideways at people. Say I'm on the train, I'm watching the guy next me. 'You *look* alright, mate—' I'm saying, 'but you don't bamboozle me. Them murderers of Lanny's, they looked

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alright. Pink cheeks an' fair curls . . . you'd never suspect that, eh?'

That's just the way Lanny had got me. And then this other thing comes on top of it.

A regular window-shaker of a night it is, black and pouring, when me and Lanny have to turn out. The house we had to find was in a bit of town that had got itself stuck off from the bulk part. Over a canal bridge we went, thick with dark, and the old screenwiper dancing at the belting rain. We didn't know where we were. We couldn't see where we were going, so we thought it best to stop and wait. Wait with the engine turning, and us having a smoke. We called out, lots of time we called out, but it was the wind and the night and things, and nobody at all. In the end it was someone—a soaked little guy, down and out of the way under his long overcoat. He knew the house:

"Oh, you're seeching Big May an' her two husbands! You'll have a job to get there, night like this. It's a rough sort of a field you have to cross." He showed us a big piece of dark: "There's the way," he says, "what there is of it." And with that he's off.

"Here goes," says Lannigan, and the old ambulance begins a-joggle across. It's a real ribby track, dead ribby. But we don't do bad. We spot a light. When we get nearer it's an open door. And there's a queer length of figure shaped in it. "We're in!" says Lannigan, bringing a couple of tonks from the horn.

"Hy——" screeches this thing from the door, "'bout bleedin' time you got here!"

Lanny stops dead. Shuts the engine off. Quiet.

"Yah—you bleddy Galway herrin' seller," he roars out, "whatyer makin' your din about?"

With that we stretches ourselves out and into the rain. I look to the door. What a figure she is. What a length. She's all the world to a big, grey, wet, winter tree.

Lannigan swaggers quietly up to her:

"What's goin' on here? What's all the yappin' about?" (I wish you could have heard him. It's the sort of voice he's got.)

She gives a shake to herself. Snorts out. I'm behind Lannigan, not too close, either.

"Two days back I posted a letter. An' you—you had to come now." She made a spit, rich and tobacco'ish, "He's at the far end. I'll lay odds he don't see the hospital."

"That's different, ma'am," apologises Lannigan, "but I can't stand a woman as bawls —"

"Bawls? Bawls?" snarls she, "where's a woman as bawls?"

"You," says Lannigan, now squaring up to her. "You bawl!"

I'm getting wet. I don't like the turn things have taken in front of me. I tug Lanny by the belt of his service coat: "Less go in, Lanny, an' get it over with."

She's not for letting it drop. But she does move inside. Nice as you like, Lannigan's on her heels—her woman's sloppy red-skinned heels.

There's a bloke, he's plastered out on an old-fashioned settee. Only his face showing, and the neck fringe of a flannel night-gown. It's just a big white podge, his face. A white podge of lard, like if you touched it there'd be fingermarks.

"Drooks? I take it the name's Drooks?" says Lannigan, eyeing a paper he'd got from his pocket. She don't contradict: she's leaning back, hands on her backside, and she's looking down on the sick bloke.

"Send him back, no matter which way it goes, when you're done with him," she tells us.

I go out and get a stretcher. Going in the door it was, I glimpsed it . . . ! a face—an idiot's face—peeking through the curtain by the middle door. He's switching a dead spiteful leer on the settee guy. Putting all that poison in one look, it makes him he drools at the lips.

Now, as I say, I'm a very ordinary sort of bloke, very ordinary: and the way I can sense this madman behind the curtain—well, it sort of puts me off. I mean for lifting the patient on the stretcher. I can see Lannigan's getting a bit aerated—holding the shoulders. It's a dead weight, and he thinks I ain't doing my whack. Just that moment he spots the face himself. It draws off as Lanny fixes it. He don't say

nothing. He changes ends with me. We bend to the fellow on the settee.

He's a size. Must be every single pound of two hundred. And we're neither of us used to the job. I bend over him, and when I do, I hear the low howling groans he's letting out. He's sticking a very nasty gaze at something: I'm frightened. I look, at what can be drawing the last drop of hate from a man's heart: I look—it's the idiot . . . ! Lannigan whips round. He's too late. He turns on the woman:

"Hear me, missus—" he grinds, "if that old cretin don't stop sticking his ugly snout out—I'll poke it for him."

"Oh, so you will, will you?" says she, sizing Lannigan up.

"Just another peck," he coaxes, and sort of piano'ing his fingers in the air, "let me glimpse it, an' I'll knock his bleddy head off his bleedin' shoulders. So I will! . . . I've just about had a sick'ner of this caper. Are you ready, mate?"

We're getting down again to this heave of a fellow, when the big woman arses me out of the way. She gives a sign with her head for Lannigan to move aside. She leans over—oh, she's a size amidships!—she shoves her branchy hands right beneath the bloke on the settee: "Be quiet, Gerald," she tells him. Up she takes him, plops him nice as can be on the stretcher. She turns, to eye Lannigan up and down:

"Men? Men?" she sneers, and snarls, "I've bogged 'em!"

"Hold your water——" snaps Lannigan, dodging a fist down into his pocket, and out he plants five bob on the table, "Cover that——" he's shaking with challenge, "Betya I put him back!"

She wipes her mitt—stone me, what a mitt—manipulates it through a slit in her greasy skirt, down and around the back, bends, feels some place under her legs, and slowly draws out a whacking black purse. She flicks a thumb on the clasp and it flies open. She fingers some silver out:

"Like to make it ten bob?" she asks of Lannigan.

"Make it what you like—I'll put him back!" vows Lanny. With that he takes all he has from his pocket. It's not much. He counts it. With the five bob on the table it doesn't come to ten. "Bill," he whispers, "lend us a quid."

"I ain't got a quid."

"Then let's what you have."



"Be still, Gerald, when I tell you——" says the woman. I cry: "Oh, Lanny—look!" It's the face again. Lanny leaps. He just misses. The woman has a poker in her hand. Lanny is over six foot. But she's over Lanny.

"An inch, mister——" she growls, "move one bleedin' inch tord that kitchen, an' I'll split you! S'help me!"

"Ooooooh, Ooooooh . . ." the guy on the stretcher begins a-moaning something horrid. I gets hold of my end:

"Come on, Lannigan, in God's Holy Name, come on——" (I'd caught his way of talking.) Lanny picks up the five bob.

"Ma'am," he says, batting not so much as an eyelid at the iron poker still over his head, "Ma'am, if it wasn't I'm a busy man, you'd be losing some money."

We lift the stretcher. She looking at Lanny the way a big woman can look. I'm in mortal fear she'll brain him with the stretcher in his hands. We get it out, and on to the rack in the ambulance. Old lard face lets out a moan. From right down in his toes it comes, long and stretched. Then he stiffens. Lanny makes a sign: a religious sign of touching his forehead and his heart, and I hear him say "Amen."

The woman is in the doorway. The idiot drawn up behind her.

"Which of you is coming along?" says Lannigan.

"None," says the woman; and the loony fair jigs.

"What! you'd let the poor ould soul die alone? Somebody's got to ride in the back with him."

"Your mate, that's his job," says the woman.

Lannigan turns to me: "It's in the book of rules, somebody must ride with him." He holds the door open. There is nothing for it. I have to get up. The rainy wind near blows me inside.

My eye catches a last flash of the big woman, there in the lighted doorway. I can't get that first image—of how she's like some terrible old tree—out of mind. The old drool is creaming on the idiot's lips as he spies under her arm. Then the doors shut on me.

I'm alone, in the low purple light: me, an ordinary bloke, alone with him, stuck stiff on the stretcher in his nightgown.

Outside there's nothing said. Lanny's taken huff at the

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woman not coming to hospital. So, there's no voices: only the rain, coming the way rain comes, in rushed spatter on the ambulance walls. I hear the *krrr-k* of the starter, and the engine snatching at it. We're moving.

The wheels take the rough road in jigs and jogs. I'm clenched to my folding seat, but there's not much to hold on to. I'm scared to put my hands out and grip the stretcher rails, fear less I touch the cold fella. He's doing a bit of a waggle. Unexpectedly, there's a vicious jolt at the front: I'm flung off my seat—flung sprawling on my face. I'm mad to get on my two feet, and bursting in a nightmare scream, with no sound coming, and can't see for the blackness, because the light's jerked out, when it touches me—a muttoney foot gropes at my face! . . .

A yell breaks out of me then. There's another toss of the ambulance, and Lardy in his nightshirt comes slithering over and atop of me . . . !

It wanted some getting through, that bit of time that followed. I couldn't get out from under him. I sweated and strained, with fear squelching my bowels. And at the same time I could feel growls—and they were coming out of the queer fella.

I nigh bashed my fists through the sides of the ambulance, when I did get up. I walloped, and crashed, and yelled. Lannigan pulled the slot back:

"What's on you, man?" he cried.

"What's on me? what's on me?" my voice going up and down like a siren. "Let me out! Listen, Lanny—let me out this second, or smash me way out I will!"

He got out of his seat. I was funk'd tight in the corner, and I heard him stump around. When he opened the doors, the dead bloke would have fell out if Lanny hadn't caught him. Lanny kind of sat him up. I was getting ready to make a dash, only the nightgown is blocking the way. I'm watching. The next moment I see him—this dead Gerald bloke—lurch down to his feet. He stands, takes bearings, then off he flounders, through wet, wind, and dark, back to the cottage.

"Well, that's a bloody nice thing to do!" says Lannigan, with disgust, "After all our trouble, too." He turned to me, "We're stuck. Can you shove if I put her in bottom gear?"

"Shove! I'll carry the soddin' truck out—if only I can get away from here."

I'm past all feelings. I wedge the shoulder of a someone who don't seem a bit like me, under the rear of the chassis. I heave away. Lannigan gets it out. I goes round and in beside him. He revs the engine: he drives slowly to a firmer piece of ground. Then he stops.

"Come on," says he to me.

"Come on what?"

"You don't imagine I'd let that blighter escape, do you? Come along back with me, we'll get him."

I was struck quiet. Just for a moment. Then I touch Lannigan on the shoulder:

"Listen: if the Angel Gabriel were to come down to me this second—I wouldn't budge an inch!"

"Huh, please yourself. I suppose it's a free country, anyway. But I'm gettin' him." And with that he skedaddles into the terrible night. Back to the cottage.

I should say it was under two, no—under three minutes, when he staggers back to his driving seat once more. Coo, did he have a lump! He tried to make out it was nothing. He tried hiding it. Why, it stuck out inches, even in the blackness. What a wam she must have let him have! Oh, she'd got home alright: crack bang on the top of his forehead. He was reeling, an' no mistake. Yet he'd a dead tuneless whistle coming from between his lips.

He sits there; I'd say he was mustering his powers for another attack. Suddenly he gives a sharp start of alarm:

"Hear that?"

"Hear what—only a cockcrow?"

"Only a cockcrow!" repeats Lanny. "Man, don't you realise what you're saying? Don't you know it's about the worst thing you can hear—a cock's crow at night? I was warned that from the cradle."

And now he starts the engine, and off we go. But, so far as the lump goes, all I could get from him was: "She changed her mind, she decided against him coming."

And that was all our guv'nor could get from him, back at the station. He scanned Lanny and his lump, and began to fume out: "Change of mind, what do you mean?"

"I said 'change of mind,' and that's what I mean—" states Lanny; then unbuttoning his tunic, he breasts up to the desk and quivers with temper at the guv'nor: "Like to make something of it, eh?"

"N-no, that's quite in order, Mr. Lannigan. I'll put down a 'change of mind.'"

We leave the Report office together. We go to the drivers' standby room. I watch Lannigan as he begins to roll a cigarette. I can see the incidents of the whole evening going, going from him. Like a face you'd meet coming out of a picture house, with the impressions fading. There's a new interest coming on it, a new stroke of memory:

"Did I ever tell you about the beating up I got?" he began. "I was round Marble Arch one Saturday night, I couldn't see a stitch before me—I'd been drinking Red Biddy the whole evening at a place in Soho. The port wine bottoms and meths don't half get you down. She picks me up, I could only smell her, I couldn't see, but it was lovely. Block of flats in Maida Vale I remember, and a little bloke in a white jersey wants money out of me. I wouldn't poppy and he hit me. He knocked me clean out, yet I could still feel him bashing blow after blow. They found me on some rails, propped up by my belt—I was wearing my dress tunic. Blood, talk about blood, my red coat was soaked sopping in it. And my face——."

I leapt at him, clapping my hand to his mouth:

"Lanny, for the sake of the mother who bore you," I screeched,"—will you turn it in!"





# MYLES NA gCOPALEEN

## Drink and Time in Dublin

### A RECORDED STATEMENT

—DID you go to that picture ‘The Lost Weekend’?

—*I did.*

—I never seen such tripe.

—*What was wrong with it?*

—O it was all right, of course—bits of it was good. Your man in the jigs inside in the bed and the bat flying in to kill the mouse, that was *damn* good. I’ll tell you another good bit. Hiding the bottles in the jax. And there was no monkey business about that because I tried it since meself. It works but you have to use the half pint bottles. Up the chimbley is another place I thought of and do you know the ledge affair above windows?

—*I do.*

—That’s another place but you could get a hell of a fall reaching up there on a ladder or standing on chairs with big books on them. And of course you can always tie the small bottles to the underneath of your mattress.

—*I suppose you can.*

—But what are you to do with the empties if you stop in bed drinking? There’s a snag there. I often thought they should have malt in lemonade syphons.

—*Why didn’t you like the rest of ‘The Lost Weekend’?*

—Sure haven’t I been through far worse weekends meself—you know that as well as I do. Sure Lord save us I could tell you yarns. I’d be a rich man if I had a shilling for every morning I was down in the markets at seven o’clock in the slippers with

the trousers pulled on over the pyjamas and the overcoat buttoned up to the neck in the middle of the summer. Sure don't be talking man.

—*I suppose the markets are very congested in the mornings?*

—With drunks? I don't know. I never looked round any time I was there.

—*When were you last there?*

—The time the wife went down to Cork last November. I won't forget that business in a hurry. That was a scatter and a half. Did I never tell you about that? O be God, don't get me on to *that* affair.

—*Was it the worst ever?*

—It was and it wasn't but I got the fright of me life. I'll tell you a damn good one. You won't believe this but it's a true bill. This is one of the best you ever heard.

—*I'll believe anything you say.*

—In the morning I brought the wife down to Kingsbridge in a taxi. I wasn't thinking of drink at all, hadn't touched it for four months, but when I paid the taxi off at the station instead of going back in it, the wife gave me a look. Said nothing, of course—after the last row I was for keeping off the beer for a year. But somehow she put the thing into me head. This was about nine o'clock, I suppose. I'll give you three guesses where I found meself at ten past nine *in another taxi?*

—*Where?*

—Above in the markets. And there wasn't a more surprised man than meself. Of course in a way it's a good thing to start at it early in the morning because with no food and all the rest of it you're finished at four o'clock and you're home again and stuffed in bed. It's the late nights that's the killer, two and three in the morning, getting poisoned in shebeens and all classes of hooky stuff, wrong change, and a taxi man on the touch. After nights like that it's a strong man that'll be up at the markets in time next morning.

—*What happened after the day you got back at four?*

—Up at the markets next morning *before* they were open. There was another chap there but I didn't look at him. I couldn't tell you what age he was or how bad he was. There was no four o'clock stuff that day. I was around the markets till twelve

or so. Then off up town and I have meself shaved be a barber. Then up to a certain hotel and straight into the bar. There's a whole crowd there that I know. What are you going to have and so on. No no, have a large one. So-and-so's getting married on Tuesday. Me other man's wife has had a baby. You know the stuff? Well Lord save us I had a terrible tank of malt in me that day! I had a feed in the middle of it because I remember sealding myself with hot coffee and I never touch the coffee at all only after a feed. Of course I don't remember what happened me but I was in the flat the next morning with the clothes half off. I was supposed to be staying with the brother-in-law, of course, when the wife was away. But sure it's the old dog for the hard road. Drunk or sober I went back to me own place. As a matter of fact I never went near the brother-in-law at all. Be this time I was well into the malt. Out with me again feeling like death on wires and I'm inside in the local curing meself for hours, spilling stuff all over the place with the shake in the hand. Then into the barber's and after that off up again to the hotel for more malt. I'll give you a tip. Always drink in hotels. If you're in there you're in for a feed, or you've just had a feed or you've an appointment there to see a fellow, and you're having a small one to pass the time. It looks very bad being in bars during the daytime. It's a thing to watch, that.

—*What happened then?*

—What do you think happened? What could happen? I get meself into a quiet corner and I start lowering them good-o. I don't know what happened me, of course. I met a few pals and there is some business about a greyhound out in Cloghran. It was either being bought or being sold and I go along in the taxi and where we were and where we weren't I couldn't tell you. I fall asleep on a chair in some house in town and next thing I wake up perished with the cold and as sick as I ever was in me life. Next thing I know I'm above in the markets. Taxis everywhere of course, no food only the plate of soup in the hotel, and be this time the cheque-book is in and out of the pocket *three or four times a day*, standing drinks all round, kicking up a barney in the lavatory with other drunks, looking for me "rights" when I was refused drink—O, blotto, there's no other word for it. I seen some of the cheques since. *The writing!* A pal carts me home in a taxi. How long this goes

on I don't know. I'm all right in the middle of the day but in the mornings I'm nearly too weak to walk and the shakes getting worse every day. Be this time I'm getting frightened of meself. Lookat here, mister-me-man, I say to meself, this'll have to stop. I was afraid the heart might give out, that was the only thing I was afraid of. Then I meet a pal of mine that's a doctor. This is inside in the hotel. There's only one man for you, he says, and that's sleep. Will you go home and go to bed if I get you something that'll make you sleep? Certainly, I said. I suppose this was about four or half four. Very well, says he, I'll write you out a prescription. He writes one out on hotel notepaper. I send for a porter. Go across with this, says I, to the nearest chemist shop and get this stuff for me and here's two bob for yourself. Of course I'm at the whiskey all the time. Your man comes back with a box of long-shaped green pills. You'll want to be careful with that stuff, the doctor says, that stuff's very dangerous. If you take one now and take another when you get home, you'll get a very good sleep but don't take any more till to-morrow night because that stuff's very dangerous. So I take one. But I know the doctor doesn't know how bad I am. I didn't tell him the whole story, no damn fear. So out with me to the jax where I take another one. Then back for a drink, still as wide-awake as a lark. You'll have to go home now, the doctor says, we can't have you passing out here, that stuff acts very quickly. Well, I have one more drink and off with me, *in a bus*, mind you, to the flat. I'm very surprised on the bus to find meself so wide-awake, looking out at people and reading the signs on shops. Then I begin to get afraid that the stuff is too weak and that I'll be lying awake for the rest of the evening and all night. To hell with it, I say to meself, we'll chance two more and let that be the end of it. Down went two more in the bus. I get there and into the flat. I'm still wide-awake and nothing will do me only one more pill for luck. I get into bed. I don't remember putting the head on the pillow. I wouldn't go out quicker if you hit me over the head with a crow-bar.

—*You probably took a dangerous over-dose.*

—Next thing I know I'm awake. It's dark. I sit up. There's matches there and I strike one. I look at the watch. The watch is stopped. I get up and look at the clock. Of course the clock is stopped, hasn't been wound for days. I don't know what



time it is. I'm a bit upset about this. I turn on the wireless. It takes about a year to heat up and would you believe me I try a dozen stations all over the place and not one of them is telling what the time is. Of course I knew there was no point in trying American stations. I'm very disappointed because I sort of expected a voice to say "It is now seven thirty p.m." or whatever the time was. I turn off the wireless and begin to wonder. I don't know what time it is. *Then*, bedamnit, another thing strikes me. *What day is it?* How long have I been asleep with that dose? Well lookat, I got a hell of a fright when I found I didn't know what day it was. I got one hell of a fright.

—*Was there not an accumulation of milk-bottles or newspapers?*

—There wasn't—all that was stopped because I was supposed to be staying with the brother-in-law. What do I do? On with all the clothes and out to find what time it is and what day it is. The funny thing is that I'm not feeling too bad. Off with me down the street. There's lights showing in the houses. That means it's night-time and not early in the morning. Then I see a bus. That means it's not yet half-nine, because they stopped at half-nine that time. Then I see a clock. It's twenty past nine! But I still don't know what day it is and it's too late to buy an evening paper. There's only one thing—into a pub and get a look at one. So I march into the nearest, very quiet and correct and say a bottle of stout please. All the other customers look very sober and I think they are all talking very low. When the man brings me the bottle I say to him I beg your pardon but I had a few bob on a horse today, could you give me a look at an evening paper? The man looks at me and says what horse was it? It was like a blow in the face to me, that question! I can't answer at all at first and then I stutter something about Hartigan's horses. None of them horses won a race today, the man says, and there was a paper here but it's gone. So I drink up the bottle and march out. It's funny, finding out about the day. You can't stop a man in the street and say have you got the right day please? God knows what would happen if you done that. I know be now that it's no use telling lies about horses, so in with me to another pub, order a bottle and ask the man has he got an evening paper. The missus has it upstairs, he says, there's nothing on it anyway. I now begin to think the best thing is to dial O on the phone,

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ask for Inquiries and find out that way. I'm on me way to a call-box when I begin to think that's a very bad idea. The girl might say hold on and I'll find out, I hang on there like a mug and next thing the box is surrounded by Guards and ambulances and attendants with ropes. No fear, says I to meself, there's going to be no work on the phone for me! Into another pub. I have the wind up now and no mistake. How long was I knocked out be the drugs? A day? Two days? Was I in the bed *for a week*? Suddenly I see a sight that gladdens me heart. Away down at the end of the pub there's an oul' fellow reading an evening paper with a magnifying glass. I take a mouthful of stout, steady meself, and march down to him. Me mind is made up: if he doesn't hand over the paper, I'll kill him. Down I go. Excuse me, says I, snatching the paper away from him and he still keeps looking through the glass with no paper there, I think he was deaf as well as half blind. Then I read the date—I suppose it was the first time the date was the big news on a paper. It says "Thursday, 22nd November, 1945." I never enjoyed a bit of news so much. I hand back the paper and say thanks very much, sir, for the loan of your paper. Then I go back to finish me stout, very happy and pleased with me own cuteness. Another man, I say to meself, would ask people, make a show of himself and maybe get locked up. But not me. I'm smart. Then begob I nearly choked.

—*What was the cause of that?*

—To-day is Thursday, I say to meself. Fair enough. But . . . *what day did I go to bed?* What's the use of knowing to-day's Thursday if I don't know when I went to bed? I still don't know whether I've been asleep for a day or a week! I nearly fell down on the floor. I am back where I started. Only I am feeling weaker and be now I have the wind up in gales. The heart begins to knock so loud that I'm afraid the man behind the counter will hear it and order me out.

—*What did you do?*

—Lookat here, me friend, I say to meself, take it easy. Go back now to the flat and take it easy for a while. This'll all end up all right, everything comes right in the latter end. Worse than this happened many's a man. And back to the flat I go. I collapse down into a chair with the hat still on me head, I sink the face down in me hands, and try to think. I'm like that for

maybe five minutes. Then, *suddenly*, I know the answer! Without help from papers or clocks or people, I know how long I am there sleeping under the green pills! How did I know? Think that one out! How would *you* know if you were in the same boat?

(Before continuing, readers may wish to accept the sufferer's challenge).

—*I am thinking.*

—Don't talk to me about calendars or hunger or anything like that. It's no use—you won't guess. You wouldn't think of it in a million years. Look. My face is in my hands—like *this*. Suddenly I notice the face is smooth. I'm not badly in need of a shave. That means it *must* be the same day I went to bed on! Maybe the stomach or something woke me up for a second or so. If I'd stopped in bed, I was off asleep again in a minute. But I got up to find the time and that's what ruined me! Now do you get it? Because when I went back to bed that night, I didn't waken till the middle of the next day.

—*You asked me how I would have found out how long I had been there after finding that the day was Thursday. I have no guarantee that a person in your condition would not get up and shave in his sleep. There was a better way.*

—There was no other way.

—*There was. If I were in your place I would have looked at the date on the prescription!*



## LORD DUNSANY

### Horace : Ode XXIII

You fly me Chloe like a hind  
    Seeking its dam in lonely crags  
With needless fear of every wind.  
    Where in the woods a zephyr wags  
The rustling foliage, or where  
    The lizards stir the draperies  
Of bramble bushes, listening there  
    It trembles in its heart and knees.  
Like no fierce tiger I pursue  
    To harm you, or Gaetolian  
Wild lion. Leave your mother; you  
    Are of an age to go with man.



E. OE. SOMERVILLE and  
MARTIN ROSS

●

Two of A Trade

It may be considered that the tale I have been asked to tell, if not exactly told by an idiot, still signifies nothing, scarcely even sound and fury, save perhaps for those who have already heard it, many times, and have had enough of it—if not too much!

For it is now a very old story, and I hate repetition. Yet the question as to how two people can write together, without battle, murder, and sudden death ensuing immediately, appears to possess eternal youth, and has never—or so I am assured—been satisfactorily answered. I do not propose to do so now, but I may be able to give an explanation or two, one being an assurance that—as Martin Ross has put it—“writing together is one of the greatest pleasures I have.”

But she has ignored the supreme, almost invariable question, as to which of us held the pen—the inspired pen! From which, as from the Ark, every living creature comes forth! . . . . .

It reminds me of my little dogs, who, when they come out rabbit-shooting are certain that the rabbits come out of the gun . . . . .

The two young women, whose efforts in literature I have been asked to discuss and explain, were cousins, members of one of those immense clans of cousins that in Ireland not only admit relationship, but know how it has occurred. For these two girls the fact that they possessed a common great-grandfather simplified such explanations; but the definition “common” must in this connection be purged of an implication that would probably cause my great aunts, his daughters to turn (if not spin) in their graves. He and his wife were people of note in the brilliant days before the Union, when Dublin was a capital city which competed not unsuccessfully with London and Paris.

These two charming people were never accustomed to a position in the back-ground, and they shall now be named: Charles Kendal Bushe, Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, brilliant wit and orator, whose clean hands unsoiled by the muddy flood of Union politics, had gained for him the title of "Incorruptible," and his wife, Nancy Crampton, a beloved friend of Maria Edgeworth—(who wrote of her "Having named Mrs. Bushe, I must mention that whenever I meet her she is my delight and admiration, from her wit, humour, and variety of conversation.")—a lovely creature in whom there burnt a flame of Art, whether glowing in Literature, Music, or Painting, so intense and so determined that even for three succeeding generations it has touched some of her descendants with something of her bright spirit.

The question of Joint Authorship is one that has very often been directed—not without a certain violence—at me, barbed with a determination to tolerate no evasions and to have the truth, that is not unreasonably based on the long row of volumes that carry the joint signatures of E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross.

Unfortunately, much as I should enjoy giving away a secret, there is none to tell. I have tried many times to formulate an effective confession but I have invariably failed, and the following must only be regarded as that tiresome and always unsatisfactory thing, an Apology.

\* \* \* \* \*

For my part, it seems to me only natural that given similar conditions of life and general out-look on the world, they should evoke a similar point of view. My Collaborator has gone nearest to a solution of what has been treated as a mystery. I will quote what she has said in a letter to me, and I must leave it at that, (but with some duplicity, she does not mention the assistance imparted by conversation!).

"Never mind what is said about people writing together. We have proved that we can do it and we shall go on. The reason few people can, is because they have separate minds upon most subjects and fight their own hands all the time. I think the two *Shockers* have a very strange belief in each other joined

to a critical faculty; added to which, writing together is, to me at least, one of the greatest pleasures I have. To write with you doubles the triumph and the enjoyment, having first halved the trouble and anxiety.”<sup>1</sup>

And so, after an interlude, the details of which I shall presently relate, Martin Ross and I resolved—indefinitely—to Write a Book (and also quite indefinitely)—I abandoned for a time my artistic ambitions, and we sat down to this new and exciting enterprise.

But that two young women—(perhaps I should say “Young Ladies”—Women had not at that time been invented) should concern themselves with the rather questionable practice of Writing Books, was, if not unheard of certainly not a thing to be encouraged. That it had been done in the Family (—a large and notable one) was not disputed.

“Yes,” the Aunts said “Certainly Louisa has written several books—but Louisa is married—”

“And they were only Children’s books,” qualified other Aunts—

It was Louisa whose unfortunate example had given the original idea. That the books were for children, and that Louisa was married (which confers a certain licentious liberty) were undoubtedly extenuations, but that Louisa and a painting play-writing cousin, Willy Wills—(once well-known in Dublin and London, as the writer of two plays that Henry Irving had made famous—“*Charles I*” and “*Olivia*”)—had collaborated, in what, in the then current slang, was called “a Shilling Shocker,” was less easily condoned.

—“Such a pity to have put such an idea into the girls’ heads—” said the Aunts, who were Louisa’s sisters and cousins, and couldn’t but feel that Louisa was to be blamed.

But, as a matter of history, it must be admitted that it was originally our Mothers who incited Martin Ross and me to the first writing that we did together, and in those days Mothers had to be obeyed.

These were Mrs. Martin of Ross House, County Galway, and Mrs. Somerville of Drishane House, County Cork, two of the chief Magnates in what took high rank to itself as The

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Memories*, page 137.

Family, and they it was who decreed to us the responsible task of compiling a Dictionary of the Family Language, and so set our feet in the path of Literature.

The task laid upon Martin Ross and me by our Mothers was a responsible one, and we were further commanded to add, to the best of our power, derivations and definitions. This would seem much to expect of two girls, whose united ages did not run to fifty years. But we had acquired a sort of reputation as letter-writers, and in those days there was no question, Mothers *had* to be obeyed! Also it may be said that we had discovered in one another a very similar outlook in literary and artistic matters, and this task was not without appeal. The Family Language consisted of what can only be described as the froth on the surface of some two hundred years of the conversation of a clan of inventive, violent, Anglo-Irish people, who, generation after generation, found themselves faced with situations in which the English Language failed to provide sufficient intensity, and they either snatched at alternatives from other tongues or invented them.

I believe a more congenial job than this could hardly have been given to us. We accepted it with enthusiasm, and seriously. We cast a drag-net over every section of the Family. By our Mothers' directions we disinterred ancient outlying nearly forgotten cousins, with resulting hauls that were almost embarrassingly successful in both number and quality. I do not propose to offer examples. Some might interest Philologists; many might shock good Governesses and Mothers more conventional than ours. I refer to these early Johnsonian efforts only because they represent Martin Ross's and my first joint response to what I think must have been ancestral stabs from the Chief Justice and his Nancy, and I must allow that they were well directed and went deep.

This was during the Spring of the year 1886, and the succeeding Summer was memorable to us for many things. Martin Ross had come from her home in the County Galway, and was now, for the first time, meeting a large company of her hitherto unknown Southern Cousins, I amongst them. She was then a little over twenty, and I a few years older. I suppose our respective stars then collided and struck sympathetic sparks.



We very soon discovered in one another a comfortable agreement of outlook in matters artistic and literary, and those colliding stars lit for us a fire that has not faded yet.

We were at the moment something elated by the approval we had earned in the matter of the Family Dictionary, and being as impecunious as is the normal condition of young hussies, we decided that we would emulate "Aunt Louisa" and "Willy Wills" and write a "Shilling Shocker." So we arrogantly announced this decision to those whom Sir Francis Hastings Doyle might speak of as our "fellow-roughs," and we probably said too much about the vast sums we were going to make out of the coming "Shocker." Martin Ross, though four years younger than I, was far better equipped than I was for a literary enterprise. She had recently flung herself into the study of Carlisle, and had been so impressed by his sledge-hammer style that in respectful and passable imitation of it, she had written some essays about Galway that had been warmly accepted by Edmund Yates and had appeared in *The World*. These essays, admirable as they were, she now set aside, and Carlisle was forgotten in the excitement of devising a plot for the coming "Shocker." It happened, however, that this Summer offered special seductions for the idle, one being the gathering in (from serious places devoted to Education and Good Works generally) as to a Playground, nearly all the boys and girls of the Family, into hospitable houses eager to receive them.

Great-Grandfathers are not, I think, always, or as a rule, persons to be trusted. They have a habit of sowing seeds of Gout and Rheumatism, and occasionally they make tactless Second Marriages, inflicting infant uncles and aunts on their families, who are usually sufficiently provided with such relations. But in selecting sites for houses they have sometimes shewn excellent taste, and in building three or four "Family Houses" on the shore of a very lovely Southern harbour, they built well. Those family houses, that perfect summer, were occupied by as gay and idle a pack of lads and lasses as ever sported away the happy hours, a couple of dozen of them, maybe more, coming and going, with nothing whatever to do but amuse themselves. Yet idle and good-for-nothing as they all were, it seems to me now that the Chief and Nancy would have no cause to be ashamed of that gang of light-hearted young blackguards.

The announcement of the enterprise of the "Shocker" had been dashinglly made by the two deserters on the finish of their first undertaking and had been received by the Fellow Roughs with some slight indignation, as being of the nature of a threat of independence on the part of the deserters. But when it became apparent that the threat was in process of realization, and the deserters were on the run, it was determined that they should be kept running, and so very certainly they were.

They were resented on so many grounds. Waste of time. Unjustified Conceit, and, chiefly, the Mutiny of two playmates. They were called "The Shockers," "The Geniuses," (this in savage irony) and they found themselves the victims of a kind of inverted Boycott, a determination to pursue them to any retreat in order to compel participation in the sport of the moment. This, on one typical occasion, being only evaded, and the escape of the fugitive "Shockers" being only secured by their over-hearing sounds of a search-party on their track, and by their fleeing instantly to the kitchen-garden, where they laid themselves at full length between rows of umbrageous Cabbage, remaining motionless while the pursuit swept by. As it passed on the leader was heard to say, vengefully, "They're hiding! — but they *shall* come! There's a nice breeze—they couldn't be sick!"

The pursuers passed.

The "Shockers" stood up, shaking from their persons adhering slugs and caterpillars. "Couldn't they!" said Martin Ross, bitterly.

This combative phase of our assault upon literature ceased with the publication by Messrs. Bentley, in two volumes, of *An Irish Cousin*.<sup>1</sup>

Martin Ross and I continued to write books together up to December, 1915, when She had to leave me, and our technique of writing together has had to be changed, and, to a certain extent, modified. But our signature is dual, as it has ever been, and I recognise no reason why I should change it and don't mean to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Irish Memories* (Longmans, Green, and Co.).

but it seems to me that I have done little or nothing in elucidating this difficulty of two minds, and two hands, and only one pen. (That autocratic, commanding pen, which has—as is so generally known and believed — so much in its power!)

I believe I am right in attributing to my Cousin the more subtle and recondite adjective, the more knife-edged slice of sarcasm, the more poetic feeling for words, and a sense of Style that seems to me flawless and unequalled. And I believe that possibly my profession as a painter, has helped and developed my feeling for colour, and sense of form, and the privileges conferred by horses and hounds (and beloved little fox-terriers) have brought all these things specially near to me.

But our reliance on one another, whether on this plane or another, is what can never be explained. There have been many empty moments, long spaces of silence, both grappling with the same intangible idea. Sometimes the compelling creative urge would come on both, and we would try to reconcile the two impulses, searching for a form into which best to cast them—one releasing it, perhaps as a cloudy suggestion, to be caught up by the other, and given form and colour, then to float away in a flash of certainty, a completed sentence—as two dancers will yield to the same impulse, given by the same strain of music, and know the joy of shared success.

It was, I suppose, because of that fundamental sympathy of which I have spoken, that in spite of practical difficulties, and sometimes of inevitable divergences of opinion, in all the happy years of our working and living together, there was never a break in the harmony of our work, nor a flaw in our mutual understanding.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wasn't it the Needy Knife-grinder who said:

"Secret? God bless you, I have none to tell!"

Ask me no more.

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## VIVIAN MERCIER



### Kate O'Brien

IN *Passion and Society* (otherwise *L'Amour et l'Occident*) Denis de Rougemont declares the essential element of Romance to be "unhappy mutual love." He cites the story of Tristan and Iseult as the archetype of all romances—though since the Renaissance *Romeo and Juliet* has gained wider currency than the mediaeval legend. He also says—correctly in my opinion—that romantic love as we know it is a Christian development, in spite of the debt which its troubadour originators owed to Plato. Christianity gave marriage an importance which it had never before possessed, and made virginity *in itself* a good—not merely an act of propitiation designed to produce a material return by magical means. Vows of celibacy were previously undertaken to promote the fertility of the earth or success in warfare or the chase. They could be undertaken by an individual for his own ends, or for the common good (e.g., the Roman Vestal Virgins).

In Christian times, however, even Christian marriage was often considered merely a lesser evil, on the lines of St. Paul's "better to marry than to burn," though those who regarded celibacy as the ideal state for *everybody*, finally came to be regarded as heretical. The troubadours were heretics to a man, and were persecuted as such.

Still, there was no doubt that marriage, while a sacrament of the Catholic Church, was also a social and economic contract under the feudal system: it was one of the accepted forms of investment in those pre-capitalist days when the opportunities for increasing one's wealth were limited. Hence, even among the orthodox, romantic love and marriage came to be regarded as incompatible. Marriage, though it ought to be inviolate, was regarded as on a lower plane than chaste, spiritual love, such as that felt for Beatrice by Dante. If Beatrice in her turn, though



married, had felt the same kind of love for Dante, that would have been an added turn of the screw. This was Iseult's case at first and, though she and Tristan afterwards sinned, they knew that they were sinning, and retribution followed.

The poignancy of true Romance comes from the conflict between love and duty, as well as from the dualism present in love itself. *Romeo and Juliet* loses effect in that the obstacles which separate the lovers are accidental or made by others, not created by their own consciences.

In our own day, perhaps the ablest practitioner of Romance in the English language has been Kate O'Brien. The theme of almost all her books is unhappy mutual love, the unhappiness generally being caused by the conflict between love and Christian duty. Unsurprisingly, her standpoint is heretical, like that of many of her great forerunners in the *genre*. First of all, she believes in the fatality of love. As she writes in her travel book *Farewell Spain* (1937):—

Fatal attraction between persons is an old poet's notion that some of us still like to believe is possible and occasional, though not probable . . . Again, she is heretical in that her sympathy is almost entirely on the side of the lovers. She has often been understandably compared with Francois Mauriac, who may with justice be described as another great modern writer of love stories. Yet their differences outweigh their similarities. Mauriac's theology is not only more orthodox—it is also more coherent. That is one of the reasons why he is the better writer.

A typical Kate O'Brien heroine, Agnes in *The Ante-Room*, will not become the mistress of her sister's husband though she loves him. She is presented as being deeply religious, but the one overriding reason which she gives her lover is this:—

"It would be as if you had killed her (the sister). I can't explain. I suppose the things we've always known are the last we understand."

In other words, her real motive for resisting temptation is her irrational affection for the beautiful elder sister who used to take her part at school. A typical Mauriac heroine, on the other hand, is the wife in *Le Baiser au Lepreux* who marries a hideous creature whom she does not love, out of a sense of duty to her parents, and remains faithful to him until his death. Mauriac here upholds Christian marriage at its least attractive, whereas Miss O'Brien uses Christian morality as a convenient piece of machinery to supply the poignant effect she seeks. Christian

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morality, of course, means something more to her as well; it is a background to her every thought and feeling, though Christian dogma, perhaps, is not.

Kate O'Brien was born on December 3rd, 1897, into a well-to-do Limerick family. She was the sixth of nine children, and when she was only five her mother died. She was thereupon sent as a boarder to Laurel Hill Convent, Limerick, along with her three older sisters, and spent twelve years there. Those years, which were for the most part happy ones, had an almost incalculable effect on Miss O'Brien—both as a personality and as a writer. Laurel Hill in those days was probably unique. The boarders were limited to thirty-five, and the nuns outnumbered them almost two to one. Miss O'Brien's novel, *The Land of Spices*, paints a delightful picture of the convent's teaching of *la pudeur et la politesse*, but omits the more extravagant details, such as the lessons on how to get in and out of one's carriage—for all the young ladies would naturally have carriages of their own when they grew up!

The hot-house atmosphere of this convent was bound to foster a sensitive plant, especially when secured at such a tender age as Miss O'Brien was. Her sensibility was being cultivated at the same time as her brain was being trained, but it is not at all surprising that she was slow to reach emotional maturity. She also grew up to be very beautiful. A convent upbringing, great beauty, and a marriage that lasted only a year—these were the forces which shaped her life in youth and helped to dictate the course it took in maturity. If art is a product of neurosis, then we need search no farther for the weapons which supplied the psychological wound, and made Kate O'Brien into a chronicler of frustrated or sinful passion.

Miss O'Brien's father died when she was eighteen and she found herself compelled to work for her living, though she drew a big enough legacy from his embarrassed estate to see her through University College, Dublin. There she obtained a second-class honours degree in English and French. She proceeded to earn a living by translating from French, by teaching, by free-lance journalism; she visited America for five months; she lived in Spain for a year as governess; she married, as before mentioned, parted from her husband, and returned to journalism: all this before she wrote any of her books.

Few people, probably, are aware that Miss O'Brien's first published work was a play, *Distinguished Villa*. This ran for twelve weeks in London during the summer of 1926, and was tried out in the United States, but never reached Broadway. Apart from the money she made by the play, Miss O'Brien gained sufficient reputation to make her income as a free-lance journalist sufficient for her needs. Her brief success did not, however, lead to a career as a playwright, and, although she has written a number of other plays, none has attained publication, and only adaptations from two of her novels have achieved commercial presentation in the West End. So that between 1926 and the appearance of her first novel, *Without My Cloak* in 1931, Miss O'Brien's literary—as opposed to journalistic—career—was in abeyance.

*Distinguished Villa*, though a stodgy enough "repertory theatre" play in some ways, presents what we can now see as a typical Kate O'Brien situation. Frances and John, the young lovers, are parted by John's obligation to his former sweetheart, Gwen, who is going to bear a child which she untruthfully says is his; John promises to marry Gwen and says good-bye to Frances. But there is a "quadrilateral," not a "triangle," for Gwen's brother-in-law, Mr. Hemworth, a middle-aged married man, is also in love with Frances. The suburban home occupied by him and his nagging, snobbish, house-proud wife is the "distinguished villa" of the title, and the play closes with his suicide. The imminent departure of Frances, and his wife's lack of sympathy during this emotional crisis, have between them overtaxed his endurance.

The rather obvious satire of suburban moral standards which runs through much of the play is perhaps necessary for the stage, but it is not Miss O'Brien's natural tone. In her novels there are virtually no unsympathetic characters; she attempts to understand and sympathise with *everybody*. I think this is impossible in the theatre. One needs a sharp contrast of character for dramatic conflict. Mrs. Hemworth, Gwen, and the real father of Gwen's child are all unsympathetic characters in *Distinguished Villa*, and properly so, but Miss O'Brien did not yet understand the true nature of her own talent, and her early theatrical success led her astray for three years more.

In 1929, however, Kate O'Brien began to write the novel



which made her name a household word—*Without My Cloak*, published in 1931. It is by no means my favourite among her books, as I do not think she had yet found herself when she wrote it, but there are excellent things in it. *Without My Cloak* sets out to be the *Forsyte Saga* of the upper middle-class in Limerick (called “Mellick” in the novel) but changes course before half way through. Its “Forsytes” are the Considine family, its “Irene” one of the Considines, Caroline, who is unhappily married. Like Irene Forsyte, she refuses to sleep with her husband. Finally she runs away to a brother in London, and there meets a friend of his with whom she falls in love.

Then the realist in Miss O’Brien gains the upper hand. Catholic matrons in the Limerick of 1870 did not leave their husbands forever, no matter how unhappy they might be. So Caroline comes quietly home again, before a scandal has been created, and it looks as though Miss O’Brien has a dead novel on her hands. But in a family chronical we have only to move on to the next generation, looking for a fresh love-story—and there it is! Denis Considine falls in love with a poor country girl, Christina Roche, and she with him. She resists him, then becomes his mistress. Her parish priest, who is also Denis’s uncle, Tom Considine, finds out the affair and, not realising how far it has gone, makes her aunt send her off to America to avoid both sin and scandal. Denis seeks her in New York, but realises when he finds her that he no longer loves her. It is still his duty to ask her to marry him, but she realises his feelings, and refuses him, though she still loves him. He returns home, marries the right girl, and will in due course become head of the family firm of Considine and Co.

There are other love-stories interwoven with the adventures of Caroline and Denis. Denis’s father and mother, Molly and Anthony Considine, are very much in love, but child-bearing is killing Molly, and she eventually dies bearing her eighth child. Anthony’s love for his eldest son Denis is almost more than paternal, and his dearest wish is to see him head of the firm, so he never marries again, but indulges him in every way. Miss O’Brien returns to this theme of homosexual love again in other novels; such love between women plays a small part in *Mary*



*Lavelle* and appears in an innocent form in *The Land of Spices*, while a great part of the latter book hinges on male homosexuality.

*Without My Cloak's* chief defect lay in its diffuseness and lack of form. It had no single unifying theme, and its parts were badly proportioned—the story of Denis and Christina taking up more than half the book, whereas Caroline's story takes up less than a quarter. Miss O'Brien's next book, *The Ante-Room* (1934), is, on the contrary, a masterpiece of compression and symmetry. The action takes place on three successive days, during which a series of alarming situations comes to a head. The *locale* is again Mellick, in the home of the Mulqueens, a branch of the Considine family; the time is the last day of October and the first two days of November, 1880.

Agnes Mulqueen is in love with Vincent O'Regan, who is married to her sister, Marie-Rose. On Sunday morning, 31st October—Hallowe'en—she awakes to learn that her sister and brother-in-law are coming down from Dublin that day. Agnes's mother, Teresa Mulqueen, is dangerously ill of cancer, and on the three successive holy days—Hallowe'en, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day—her family are holding a triduum of prayer for her intention. On Tuesday there will be a consultation of specialists, though Dr. Curran, the family physician, who is in love with Agnes, believes it will be of little use.

Teresa is battling for her life only for the sake of her son, Reggie, who is infected with syphilis—at that time a virtually incurable disease. Without her he would have no centre in his semi-invalid life, no affection to make life worth living. But she has hopes of marrying him to her nurse—a marriage of convenience, in which Reggie's position and money would off-set the impossibility of normal sexual relations.

These various unhappy situations are resolved for better or worse during the three days. The first evening Vincent tells Agnes he loves her and knows that she loves him. Made strong by having confessed and received absolution, she rejects him. The following night she meets him in order to beg him not to see her for a year; she refuses to run away with him. They kiss good-bye, and only thus fully realise the bitterness of their parting. Next day Vincent commits suicide in such a way as to make it appear an accident.

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That same day, the doctors have decided that Teresa is beyond recovery; but she is now resigned to dying, for the nurse has agreed to marry Reggie.\* Only Agnes and Dr. Curran are left with their problems unsolved—they, we know, will neither commit suicide nor marry each other. Marie-Rose, who has been bitterly unhappy in her marriage with Vincent though she loves him, will soon get over her loss and marry again—or so the reader guesses. Teresa's husband, even, feels relief, for the sight of her pain of body and mind had driven him almost distracted. Her death will be a release to him as well as a sorrow. Agnes's final situation is the same as that of Frances at the end of *Distinguished Villa*; she has lost the only man she could ever love, or so the romantic reader is encouraged to believe.

Miss O'Brien says, and I agree with her, that *The Ante-Room* is her best novel. Other people familiar with her work prefer *Mary Lavelle* (1936) in which the situation is very similar. The scene is now set in Spain in 1922, but the heroine is again a beautiful Limerick girl, this time a governess in a Spanish family, as Miss O'Brien herself was that year. Mary Lavelle falls in love with her employer's married son, and he with her. Moreover, to complete the quadrilateral yet again, her employer, too, falls in love with her, though he never admits this to anyone.

In this case the unhappy lovers consummate their love on the eve of Mary's premature departure from Spain. Her lover's father, miles away, learns of their love affair and dies of a heart attack. This is a very severe shock to the pair, especially as they realise that they themselves are the cause of his death. They part in repentant mood, but knowing that they will always love each other, and Mary goes back to Ireland resolved to break off with her Irish *fiancé*, leave her father's house, and begin life again alone.

The every-day life of a wealthy Spanish family is presented sympathetically in *Mary Lavelle*, and also the peculiar "little Ireland" of the local "Misses"—the Irish governesses whose only qualifications are that they speak English and profess the Catholic religion. They sneer at Spain, yet will never go back to Ireland because they are too comfortable where they are. One of these women marries a bull-fighter and settles down in Spain. He gives his cloak to Mary as a souvenir when she leaves, and she bursts

into tears over it in the train, so symbolical of Spain does it seem to her.

With *Mary Lavelle* we reach a crux in Miss O'Brien's career; the remaining novels are—with one exception, *The Land of Spices*,—disappointing, and they are less concerned with "unhappy mutual love." In *Mary Lavelle*, at the age of thirty-nine, Miss O'Brien begins to find that romantic love is not enough for her any longer, either as a woman or as a novelist. In this book, speaking in her own person, she writes of "the mighty lie of romantic passion," but goes on to say that those who have "endured" it "remember usually, in spite of themselves, and would not have escaped it." Her heroine puts the position rather differently to her lover:—

"I've never been in love, Juanito—until now. So I used to think it a lovely, suitable thing, that would grow in its time. I thought I'd like the feeling and be able to manage it and make—people—happy through it. Just now I don't think it's like that."

"What do you think?"

"That it's a perfectly unreasonable illusion—and must be borne as that. It's of no use. It's not suitable or manageable. It blurs things, puts everything out of focus. It's not a thing to live with. It's a dream."

For the ten years since *Mary Lavelle* appeared, Miss O'Brien has treated love in her novels no longer as a fatal passion, but as a "dream"—something imaginary, or, if real, then not absolutely disastrous in its effects.

In her next novel, *Pray For the Wanderer* (1938), she treats love as largely a matter of the imagination. The hero, if he can be called such, is a hypothetical contemporary Irish writer who returns to his native town after ten years in London. He is nursing what he believes to be a broken heart for a London actress who has for two years been his mistress, but refuses to leave her husband for him. He falls in love with the Irish way of life, and imagines himself to be in love with his Irish cousin. She refuses him, saying that she has no desire to compete for his affections with the image of his actress-love which he has created for himself—his Galatea. Meanwhile, her sweetheart of long ago, whom she had then rejected because he was the father of an illegitimate child, grows jealous of the author, and admits that he is still in love with her. This time she agrees to marry him, and all is happiness in Ireland as the great man departs for America, having now grown impatient with his native land once more.



Here we have a tale of true love rewarded, which is a most unusual theme for Miss O'Brien. More than that, the book was written in five months, unlike the other novels, which usually took two or three years; this haste is evident all through. Personally, I am convinced that the cause of these unusual features was the banning of *Mary Lavelle* in the Irish Free State. Miss O'Brien has clearly made her hero an author—and a banned one at that—so that through his mouth she may register her protest against modern Ireland's love of censorship, puritanism, and general obscurantism. This she does at interminable length. Most of the book consists of conversations on politics, religion and morality which have nothing to do with the kind of story Miss O'Brien is trying to tell. Not only is she attempting to justify herself before the Irish people by attacking the principle of censorship, but she is also, rather illogically, seeking to write a book which will prove acceptable to them and to their Censorship Board. In a way she has succeeded, but the book was unacceptable in the sense that very few people bothered to read it—so unsatisfying and argumentative did it turn out to be.

I have already drawn attention to the absence of unsympathetic characters in Miss O'Brien's novels, and I think that this characteristic has become more pronounced with the passing of time. With her, to understand is to forgive, as the heroine of *Pray For the Wanderer* finally forgives her old sweetheart the error of his youth. In Miss O'Brien's next novel, *The Land of Spices* (1941), one of the themes is the sympathy that the elder heroine gradually begins to feel for her pederastic father.

*The Land of Spices* deals with the schooldays of Anna Murphy at the convent of a French Order of nuns in Ireland, and with the relationship between her and the English Reverend Mother over the years. *Mère Marie-Hélène* (Helen Archer was her name in the world) is about to resign from her exacting post when little Anna, aged six, wins her pity and motherly interest. Anna comes from a broken home, and is at first rather unhappy at school, but Reverend Mother takes her part and decides to continue in her own position in the convent, despite her unpopularity among the Irish nuns and clergy. Later she helps Anna through a dangerous emotional crisis following the drowning of her favourite brother. Also, when Anna's time comes to leave the convent, Reverend



Mother makes sure that she will be permitted to take up her University scholarship and have a career suited to her talents.

Anna in her turn has a beneficial influence on Reverend Mother both by being indirectly the means of keeping her at her post of duty, and by fostering human sympathy in her heart. The springs of that sympathy had been suddenly dried up many years ago when Helen Archer, at eighteen, accidentally and unseen discovered the abnormality of her English-professor father. Immediately she gave up the University career which seemed to lie before her and joined the order of nuns which had educated her.

Estranged from her father for many years, she began to grow close to him again when sent to her old convent in Brussels; then she went to Ireland and became softened still further by her contact with Anna, so that when she heard of her father's tranquil but pagan death, she almost wanted to ask his pardon for all the injury *she* had done to *him*.

Just as Anna is about to leave school, Reverend Mother learns that she, too, is leaving to become Mother General of the whole Order of Nuns. Her good work in Ireland has earned her this honour.

Naturally Miss O'Brien in this novel draws nostalgically upon all her own long experience of convent-school life; she makes nuns and the conventual life seem real and understandable in a way that I have never seen even attempted in English fiction before. This was the secret of the book's great success among members of all religions, but especially among Catholics. Ironically, the book was banned in Eire for its one explicit reference to unnatural love.

Moreover, into Reverend Mother's battles with the local clergy and her Irish nuns we can read much valuable criticism of modern Ireland, though the novel is set in the years prior to 1914. Here Miss O'Brien has found a valid technique for *implying* the criticism which was too explicit to be effective in *Pray for the Wanderer*.

If the main theme of *The Land of Spices* is love at all, then it must be the quasi-maternal love felt by Reverend Mother for Anna. Miss O'Brien's next novel, *The Last of Summer* (1943), is again a study of maternal love, this time of a very jealous kind. An orphan girl, half-French, half-Irish, visits her Irish aunt and

cousins, only to find that the latter are unaware of her existence. Later it turns out that this is because her father jilted the aunt, who eventually married one of his brothers. Angèle, who is an actress like her French mother, falls in love, first with Irish life, and then with the eldest of her Irish cousins. He is his mother's darling, who has made up to her since her husband's death for all that the husband was not. Tom falls in love with Angèle, too, but first cousins cannot marry without a papal dispensation. While this is being obtained, the second World War is drawing nearer and nearer. The mother pretends to be delighted by the engagement, but skilfully uses the external obstacles and her own ascendancy over both Tom and Angèle to separate the lovers. The pull of France reasserts itself, and Angèle in any case lacks the courage for an endless struggle with her prospective mother-in-law. In the end she returns to France at the outbreak of war, with her dream of marrying and settling in Ireland shattered, but her acting career intact.

The love of Tom and Angèle is real, no doubt, but they both regard it as little more than a waking dream which lacks the power to divert their lives from the lines laid down for them by their respective mothers—French actress and Irish country gentlewoman being alike dominating characters.

Miss O'Brien's latest novel, *That Lady* (1946), whose American title is *For One Sweet Grape*, represents an entirely new departure for her. All the characters are historical, the period is the second half of the seventeenth century, and the central situation is a baffling episode in Spanish internal politics of the time.

Ana de Mendoza, according to Miss O'Brien's interpretation, was half in love with Philip II from her girlhood onwards, and he with her. Having married her to Ruy Gomez, his best counsellor and best friend, Philip was too loyal to seek her as his mistress. After Ruy's death Ana had an affair with Antonio Perez, another of the king's right-hand men and a corrupt intriguer. When Philip found out about this affair, he allowed their enemies to try every means of injuring Ana and Antonio; finally he intervened to imprison both. He offered Ana her freedom on the condition of never seeing Antonio Perez again, but she refused, and eventually died in prison.

Philip's motive, Miss O'Brien thinks, was the same as that of the dog in the manger. He refused to allow another to enjoy what he could not or would not enjoy himself. This attitude is in keeping with all we know of Philip's tortuous, half-puritanical nature. Unfortunately, Miss O'Brien makes Ana her central character, and not the fascinating and perplexing Philip, as he should have been.

Ana's chief interest for the reader lies in the fact that she has known three kinds of love. Her love for Philip is chaste and born of admiration for her own idealised picture of his character and abilities. Her married love for Ruy—a man about twice her age is durable but not passionate; it resembles friendship rather than love. Her love for the married debauchee Antonio Perez springs from complete sexual satisfaction, such as her husband was never able to give her. This last love eventually turns to loyalty; she will not desert Perez when things are going against him—neither to save her body nor to save her soul.

The novel breaks down once Philip intervenes in the liason between Ana and Antonio. From there on the story is one of action and intrigue—and, as such, beyond Miss O'Brien's scope. She still continues it in a series of quiet, undramatic conversations, mostly of monumental Castilian dignity and dullness. Ana's story really ends with her first imprisonment—except for one last meeting with Antonio—but the 340-page novel has still another 100 pages to run at this point. Miss O'Brien has, I am afraid, made a mistake in her choice of theme, and also in her treatment of it. All her chief characters—mostly astute politicians—behave in an impossibly noble and understanding way. I feel Ana's story was a great deal more sordid and banal than it is as Miss O'Brien presents it. She manages to smother with an enveloping blanket of rather woolly prose even the excruciating moment when an enemy of Perez discovers the guilty lovers in bed. Nothing could have provided a greater contrast to the razor-sharp edges of *The Ante-Room*.

Perhaps the most significant character in Miss O'Brien's later novels is Uncle Corney from *The Last of Summer*. He is the third and weakest in character of the three Kernahan brothers, all of whom were in love with Hannah, the mother-heroine of the novel. By a peculiar combination of circumstances old Corney, who never had the ghost of a chance with Hannah, is



the only brother left living under the same roof as she, and is likely to end his days there. Corney has no remaining illusions about Hannah, and is less concerned with her than with where his next drink is coming from. He sees the whole irony of his situation and chuckles over it, feeling that he has got the better of his two magnificent brothers. He has had all the luck, both in not marrying Hannah, and in not having had to leave home because of her. In the stage adaptation of *The Last of Summer*, Corney, rather than Hannah or Angèle, is the central figure. It is the *reductio ad absurdum* of romantic love, and we have passed from the plane of tragedy to that of comedy.

I have now come to the end of the Kate O'Brien canon. Her novels are essentially meditations upon, and interpretations of, experience. Of late, this meditateness colours her style too much. Whereas in her earlier novels the story she had to tell was so skilfully contrived as to provide its own interpretation, she now supplies her own commentary in and out of season. It might be a salutary exercise for her to canalise this reflective, moralising side of her character into a *journal intime*, or a collection of *pensées* or *maximes*. In this way the already slow pace of her novels would not be impeded by unnecessary matter.

I do not use the word "moralising" unkindly. If Miss O'Brien were not a moralist—in the wider sense of the word—as well as a story-teller, there would be little point in writing a lengthy essay like the present one about her work. She herself said in a letter to the present writer:—

I am a moralist, in that I see no story unless there is a moral conflict, and the old-fashioned sense of the soul and its troubling effect in human affairs.

This moral conflict and sense of the soul are to be found in all Miss O'Brien's novels, and perhaps nowhere more strikingly than in her latest. Ana de Mendoza, like most seventeenth century Spaniards, is very concerned with the state of her soul—but her concern is not a selfish one. If her soul's salvation can be achieved only at the expense of Antonio's happiness, then she feels God cannot have her on those selfish terms. All through her affair with Antonio she is conscious of sin. This consciousness, she says:—

"... keeps you from self-pity and from putting the stresses wrong; and it prevents the kind of regret that blames other people. Besides, it keeps memory clear. You'll forgive me if I say that when one has sinned—in



the sensual sins, the sins of pleasure—in full private cognizance of guilt, one does not afterwards forget, as sentimentalists do, how sweet the pleasure was and how much it gave you. You buy it high, you see.”

Yet at another time she can think of:—

“ . . . the cold beastliness of calculated love-pleasure, and the absurdity of sexual delight.”

Miss O'Brien is aware, in other words, of the demands of both flesh and spirit, and she finds them irreconcilable. She has no synthesis to offer. Ana de Mendoza only “makes her soul” when age, imprisonment and illness have tamed her body for ever. As Miss O'Brien has grown older, her interest has shifted from the youthful beauties among her heroines—Frances, Christina, Agnes, Mary Lavelle—to maturer women like *Mère Marie-Hélène*, Hannah Kernahan, and Ana de Mendoza—who is thirty-six and the mother of ten children when she first appears. This is a tendency which may be expected to continue, and Miss O'Brien's more light-hearted attitude towards romantic love will become more pronounced also.

If we examine *Distinguished Villa*, *The Ante-Room* and *Mary Lavelle*, we see that one character in each died for love. Denis de Rougemont has pointed out how closely allied the death-wish is to romantic love, and how essential the death of one or both lovers is to a romance like *Tristan and Iseult* or *Romeo and Juliet*. A deity to whom sacrifices are no longer made is no deity at all. The fact that no one any longer dies for love in Miss O'Brien's novels is a measure of the change in her attitude towards what used to be her prime subject-matter. I think it is safe to say she will never give us another *Ante-Room* or *Mary Lavelle*, but she may well give us another *Land of Spices*.

It will be asked of Miss O'Brien—as it is of every Anglo-Irish writer—whether she is really an *Irish* writer. The answer, I think, is an unqualified affirmative. Only in a predominantly Catholic country could she have developed her attitude to the whole problem of sex. She is preoccupied with sin without being puritanical; sin is not, for her, something that does not happen—or, if it does, that cannot be spoken or written about. Sin is human and “natural,” but can, by God's grace, be redeemed. The fact that Miss O'Brien's books sometimes come into conflict with the prejudices of our puritanical Censorship Board means little. Her books are eagerly read in Ireland, and are probably

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better understood there than anywhere else. A servant we had in Dublin used to borrow Miss O'Brien's books from my wife and me, and read them until the small hours. She had no more than the usual national school education, but the moral postulates on which the novels were based happened to be those that she was familiar with.

If upper-middle-class Irish life as depicted by Miss O'Brien seems very like the life of the same class in Britain—except for its Catholicism—the truth of the matter is that it *is* so—or was in the pre-Rebellion period of which she mainly writes. Her models as a novelist are English, because all the best novels about that particular class happen to *be* English. That does not make her work English, any more than Frank O'Connor's modelling his work on Chekhov makes his Soviet—or Tsarist—Russian.

However, I think it is beside the point to enquire whether Miss O'Brien's work is specifically Irish. What is important is that Ireland has given to a world a talented psychological novelist who sees emotional problems in moral terms—as most of us still do in Ireland.

## L. A. G. STRONG



### Symbols, Words, and Finnegans Wake

SYMBOLS are of many kinds, and have many uses. Primarily a symbol is the statement of a mental association. Some symbols resemble visually what they stand for, e.g. phallic symbols. Others are so dramatic that primitive men everywhere invent the same idea to explain them: thunder has been always associated with the voice of an angry god. There are many symbols so widespread, and so obviously appropriate, that people readily relate each one of them to the same object or idea. These we might call universal symbols. When the association is arbitrary, however, and holds good for one person only, or for a limited group, we speak of a private symbol. Groups of children, and families, often make symbols of this kind for their exclusive understanding. (Groups of poets, in the nineteen-twenties, were accused of doing the same thing.) Mathematical symbols are arbitrary, but not private, since very large numbers of people, widely separated in space and time, have agreed to give them limited and precise associations. Magical symbols appear to be arbitrary: the cabalistic symbol for fire has no obvious appropriateness to what it stands for: but whether or not they are private is open to argument, since their users claim for them a universal validity. For example, Yeats reports that when, at a dinner party, he concentrated mentally on the symbol for fire, inside a couple of minutes the company were talking about fires in the city. Many similar instances are on record, and, without believing or disbelieving them, we may note that there is a tradition of effective symbolism of this kind, of a correspondence between symbol and object which is said to hold good even for people who have never heard of it.

A broader symbolism of this sort, claimed by some

authorities to be universal, is found in dreams. Psychologists account for it variously, under the heading of myth. For one school, these myths relate to the early experiences of childhood, clothing Mother and Father with vast and dimly apprehended significance. This school reads major dreams magically, that is, with set connotations. A garden invariably means this, a river means that, and so forth. Another school relates the major dream symbols to the mythology of the race, using the hypothesis of a general reservoir of racial memory, which it calls "the collective unconscious," and places at a deeper level than the "personal unconscious," which contains the associations that are peculiar to the individual and are the results of his own personal experience. In this view, the symbols are magical too, but in a different way. They conform to a general pattern, and their application is decided long before they enter the individual's experience, but it is more flexible, less deterministic, a figurative rather than a literal magic.

To be wholly satisfactory, a symbol must hold good on every level of reality. Thus, if I may say so in all reverence, the Christian symbol of Bread and Wine is perfect. On the material level, these elements will sustain life, and nourish the body of an unbeliever, or a rat. On the higher levels, they will sustain and nourish the ultimate ecstasies of mystic and saint. Few symbols have such magical ubiquity and relevance, but there is a general feeling that the value of a symbol depends on the range of its applicability and the constancy of the associations which it embodies.

This craving for breadth and permanence sooner or later makes most writers uneasy about their medium. "Words, words, words": we cannot but realise that of all symbols words may be the most arbitrary, and therefore of the narrowest application. Words stand for objects, ideas, relationships. They are names which we have agreed to give to these things. If our cat has a kitten, and we call it Frank, or Scrub, or Topsy, the name is a very imperfect symbol for the kitten, because no one outside our immediate circle will associate it with what it stands for.<sup>1</sup> In the same way, a word in one language does not necessarily have the same associations as the

<sup>1</sup> Schoolboys' nicknames, often magically apt, show how often we are dissatisfied with inadequate labels for an individual.



word that seems to correspond to it in another language, as every translator knows to his sorrow. Worse, even in the same language words can gradually change their meaning. Our symbol will not be calling up in others the associations it has for ourselves. Poets especially are concerned here, since so many of their effects depend on the emotional associations of a word, or else on stripping the word of its "barnacles" and persuading the reader to see it afresh. Even so, the poet is better off than most writers, since he can use rhythm and the ritual of a traditional form to give his word a magical validity, and make it part of an incantation. That he does so is shown by the high survival value of great poetry, and its power to retain the magic of constant associations across great stretches of time. Prose can do this, too, but with greater difficulty, since its forms and rhythms do not as a rule stimulate the reader's consciousness to so high and sensitive a level, and it less often gives the opportunity to the single word set in such a position that its power is magically intensified.

*Against the Capitol I met a lion  
That glar'd upon me and went surly by . . . .*

and of the wild swans,

*I have gazed upon these brilliant creatures  
And now my heart is sore . . . .*

This power to throw the single word into relief makes its associations precise<sup>1</sup> instead of vague—no less precise word than "brilliant" could well be imagined, taken out of this context—and therefore gives them a far greater chance of constancy. For words are in the first instance arbitrary symbols, and their associations vague and uncertain.

To realise how fortuitous a business creative writing is, and what integrity and precision are needed to stabilise and make it good, imagine for a moment that the two open pages before you are blank, that the right hand page represents the material world, and the left hand page the world of the imagination, the world of values, the so-called unconscious. (We are justified, I think, in assuming, with a formidable company of poets, critics,

<sup>1</sup> Not the same thing as narrow! The more precise a symbol is on its first level, the greater its range. Once the level is changed, any vagueness is magnified a hundredfold.

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painters, musicians, and psychologists, that creative work begins in the unconscious mind.) A poet—or painter, or musician: but, for our present purpose, a poet—sees, on the right hand page, in the material world, something which deeply moves him. He feels the emotion in his inner world, on the left hand page, where he cannot do anything about it, since he is incarnate on the right, which contains all his means of doing anything about anything. However, he has learned a craft of so arranging little black marks, or symbols, on the right hand page, as to represent, however inadequately, something of what he feels on the left. The reader comes along, and reads the arrangement of these symbols which makes the poem. If it arouses in him no emotion on *his* left hand page, so much the worse for him and for the poet. He is a bad reader for that poem, and it is a bad poem for him. But if there is aroused on his left hand page a disturbance more or less resembling what the poet felt (and he cannot feel the same, for no two human souls are alike), then the magic has worked, the symbols have been valid, the associations have been precise enough to do what the poet hoped.

This difficulty has worried writers at all times. "If now," Goethe said,

"a man of genius gain an insight into the secret operations of nature, the language which has been handed down to him is inadequate to convey anything so remote from ordinary affairs. He should have at his command the language of spirits, in order to express truly his peculiar perceptions."

The language of spirits is not available. "Poets are not permitted to shoot beyond the tangible"—to repeat Yeats's phrase. The language of the right hand page is inadequate to convey the experience of the left. It is in this sense that the poet is the "mediator between the world of reality and the world of dreams."

Joyce saw this difficulty from the first, and his reaction to it was characteristic. By limiting and concentrating upon his subject matter, he would ensure the maximum of right-hand page precision and allow his unconscious mind, his left hand page, to work freely. Then, by combining words and drawing on several languages, he would establish his own associations, and make his own language. The tendency of words to change their meaning he would guard against by bringing together associations from every period within reach, and so free his

language from time altogether. *Finnegans Wake* is a continuum: and Joyce has met the difficulties of communication inherent in his left-hand-page material by ensuring that the only communication that takes place must be on his own terms. Only a megalomaniac could have conceived and attempted the book, but a megalomaniac astute enough to capitalise his qualities and his defects: his amazing sense of words, his skill in languages, his musical ear, his gift of fun, his imitativeness: his solitariness, his detachment, his lack of warm human sympathy, his comparative inability to make things happen. The best incidents in his books are in dialogue, his most dramatic happening the quarrel at the dinner table in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The action in *Ulysses* might be painted on a wall, so much less vivid is it than the dialogue; its value is in the effects it produces on the characters' thoughts and feelings. Joyce's characters do not develop, for the sufficient reason that they are given no time. *Ulysses* lasts only a day, *Finnegans Wake* a night. Again, it is just as well, for Joyce's view of character is static, and has affinities to that of Dickens and Ben Jonson. He plots an area, and proceeds to fill it closely in with accumulated, not with progressive, detail. To point this out is not to disparage Joyce's character drawing, which can be magnificently successful. But his method, which proceeds by agglomeration, makes for generalised portraits. We are told more than we are shown about Simon Dedalus. He was

"a medical student, an oarsman, a tenor, an amateur actor, a shouting politician, a small landlord, a small investor, a drinker, a good fellow, a storyteller, somebody's secretary, something in a distillery, a taxgatherer, a bankrupt and at present a praiser of his own past."

What we see of him would not tell us nearly so much. There is always with Joyce a tendency to dilate character into myth. "I do most solemnly maintain," writes Miss Rebecca West, "that Leopold Bloom is one of the greatest creations of all time: that in him something true is said about man." About man: that is just it. Man the generic figure, timeless man: the Jew in history, the Jew as distinct from, let us say, Shylock, who is a Jew. I am neither advocating nor attacking Joyce's method, only showing that, because of the quality of his temperament and the nature and size of his medium, it is different in kind.

Ideally, Joyce likes to have all the action of his story present



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before he begins. It irks him, in *Ulysses*, to be obliged to unfold it in sequence. He is continually telling us about things before we know what they mean, as with the paper in Bloom's hat, and his cake of soap. But *Finnegans Wake* gave him everything he wanted: no action, no movement—unless you count the child's wetting his bed—and the whole of his material to hand, catalogued, malleable, all around him, before he began. Starting from the publican's inert body in the bed within the four walls of the room of the house in the street of the city of Dublin in Ireland at a point of time in the earliest years of the twentieth century, his creation can radiate in all directions, slide from level to level, range recorded time, and challenge time-to-come by arrogating to itself the quality of timelessness. That was Joyce's aim, to the fulfilment of which he gave the last seventeen years of his working life. He aimed in full understanding of his own powers and limitations, and, as we see, he took advantage of both. Only time can show how far he succeeded.

What is the situation expounded in *Finnegans Wake*? From its twilight realm of consciousness how much emerges?

The theme is, once more, paternity. "Who were Shem and Shaun the living sons and daughters of?" The spiritual paternity of Bloom for Stephen has given place to a deeper, even more painful ache of wonder. Another Irish writer, by coincidence a friend of Joyce, said to me bitterly one evening, as we walked away together from a party—I had spoken of the surprise with which one saw in one's child knowledge and qualities one could not account for—"Your son whom you begot is not your son. He is a changeling, a stranger. But one day, in a bus or a tram, for a minute, without speaking, you see a young man or a boy, and never see him afterwards. *That* is your son."

Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, landlord of The Bristol public house, close to the Phoenix Park in Dublin, has gone to bed. It is a summer evening, there has been a thunderstorm, and evidently a certain amount of noise at closing time. The name Earwicker is of Scandanavian origin, and a racial memory, moulded by Earwicker's sense of inferiority, causes the patrons of the pub to figure as Vikings and sail up the Liffey under his leadership. As he sleeps, Earwicker labours under a load of



guilt. He has sinned, he has fallen, both as Humpty Dumpty, whose name resembles his own, and as Adam, the latter correspondence being prompted by an Adam mantelpiece. His wife shares the bed with him, but he takes little stock of her. They have three children, Isobel, a girl of sixteen or seventeen, and twin boys, Kevin and Jerry. The personnel of the pub is completed by a maid called Kate and an odd-job man called Tom: and the patrons are generic, with typical Irish names.

Kevin (Shem), his mother's favourite, is being trained for the priesthood; Earwicker seems to think him artful, and is out of sympathy with him. He is presently identified with Joyce himself. Jerry (Shaun, Jaun, Yawn, etc.) is Earwicker's favourite, and there is something not altogether fatherly about his feelings towards the boy. There is a strong incestuous tinge in his feelings towards Isobel, who appears as Iseult in his fantasy, while he is Tristram. These suppressed feelings colour all his dream, and break out in a variety of disguises. Swift is tormented by love for Stella and Vanessa, love which will never make him a father. Conscience and the Fall motif find expression in a struggle between Saint Michael and Satan, and in Napoleon, whose defeat is recalled by the monument to Wellington in the Phoenix Park. Throughout the book are frequent arguments between pairs of opposites, the Mookse and the Gripes, the Ondt and the Gracehoper, Cain and Abel, the stone and the tree, which would appear to dramatise the opposition in character, first of all, between Shem and Shaun, and more fundamentally between the introverted and extraverted parts of Earwicker himself. Towards the end of the book, there is a resurrection: Earwicker's sense of guilt falls away, Tristram has made a home for Isolde, the Phoenix Park has become the Phoenix<sup>1</sup> of a new phase of civilisation and a new life, and the dreamer wakes.

Beyond this point, I cannot be certain. A great mass of detail emerges from the mist, but I cannot with confidence relate it to its place in the static story. For instance, the four old men wax waspish over the love of Tristram for Isolde, but I do not

1 "Wholly vanished was that street of the City of Seven Hills, and out of the city's ashes rose the bird Phoenix, which having encompassed several deaths and resurrections alighted on the Thames, whose virgin waters then conceived an abundance of life, such as had been once that of the Euphrates, of the Nile and of the Tiber, bereaved rivers now flowing into sacred dead water." John Cournos, *Babel*.

know whether they are censorious in their capacity as the four apostles, or whether, as the four walls of Earwicker's room, or the four posts of his bed—

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,  
Bless the bed that I lie on . . .

they deprecate the errands of his dream, and would like to hold his unconscious mind as surely as they hold his body. I realise that the terrific explosion of consonants and vowels on the first page of the book is the thunder-clap that sets primitive men imagining gods in order to propitiate them, but is the real thunder still muttering over the Bay or up on Three Rock Mountain, and is Earwicker's later windburst an echo or a parody? There is hardly any limit to the questions that can be asked: but the real question is, what has Joyce gained by his method of presentation? He himself denied that the method was difficult.

"If there is any difficulty in reading what I write it is because of the material I use. In any case the thought is always simple."<sup>1</sup>

This refers to *Ulysses*, but to its more intricate passages, and he does not appear to have recanted it, in his own person at least—we probably should not take the references in *Finnegans Wake* to his "usylessly unreadable Blue Book" too seriously. But is all the difficulty in the material? Unless by material Joyce meant texture, this is hard to accept. The trouble is that Joyce is doing two things at once, and they are not so much complementary as at cross-purposes. He has taken the method of free association and dream-amalgam, and the timeless four-or-five-things-at-once thinking of the unconscious mind, and crossed it with the deliberate ingenuity of the conscious mind to reproduce and greatly complicate these qualities. Thus consciousness, instead of explaining Earwicker's dream material, makes it more difficult. Given a clue or two, we can find out what a dream is about, or at any rate get the gist of it. But consciousness is logical, and because, do what it will, it has to work in terms of three dimensions of space and one of time, it very seriously confuses our attempts to measure unconscious material, by introducing a second standard of reference. Joyce did not just elaborate and make acrostics from unconscious

<sup>1</sup> *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*, Frank Budgen.

material: it was not as simple as that. He complicated the whole creation by bringing in a second and incompatible way of assessing experience.

In so difficult a matter, let us look for a little support from authority. Both methods have been observed in Joyce. Mr. Desmond MacCarthy, in this case a hostile witness, complains that,<sup>1</sup>

"The attempt (endless and hopeless in its very nature) to reproduce in print the very texture of consciousness leads Mr. James Joyce to record, in page after page, the jabberings—I cannot call them sub-*human*, but they are sub-*rational*—of the idiot or flat-headed savage who talks unheard in the backward abyss of our minds, and sometimes screams audibly in delirium."

It appears from the context that by "the very texture of consciousness" Mr. MacCarthy means that which we have been calling the unconscious, and that he takes of it a limited and strictly Freudian view to which Joyce would not have subscribed. The unconscious as viewed by Joyce contains not only ape-like urges but intuitions of immortality: and he had good authority for so regarding it.

"Neurosis is not necessarily a manifestation of weakness; it may be a valid indication of nobility of character or type. Thus the psychiatrist . . . has as his function, not the mere raising of a person of inferior quality to the normal level, but that of one who assists in creative work, who becomes, as it were, the accoucheur to render help in what is something of more significance than are mere private distresses."

Thus Dr. Gustav Richard Heyer, in a dissertation<sup>2</sup> upon Jung's approach to the problems of the unconscious. But let us come to a notice of Joyce's second process. Referring to the necessity for substituting the original for the associated image in order to get at the writer's architecture and meaning (in other words, to find out what the dream image symbolises), Mr. John Sparrow cautiously remarks:—<sup>3</sup>

"It is interesting to be told that some of Joyce's work is composed by a converse method: the writer starting with a straightforward logical structure, which he then alters and breaks up by substituting and inserting ideas suggested by associations existing in his own mind, or supposed to exist in the minds of his characters."

The problem is, can the two traffics be continuous and be interwoven in harmony? Or will they collide? And so, to save

<sup>1</sup> *Criticism*, 1932. <sup>2</sup> *The Organism of the Mind*: translated by Eden and Cedar Paul. <sup>3</sup> *Sense and Poetry*.

further confusion, can the second movement be allowed to predominate? Mr. Sparrow is on the side of consciousness.

"Once association is made dominant in the choice of component ideas, there is a risk that it will play havoc with the structure of the thought itself. The component sentences may be, by themselves, intelligible, but they seem not to express the single movement of a mind."

If Joyce's sentences do not express the single movement of a mind, it is because there is so often a double movement. A man standing on both banks of a stream is trying simultaneously to jump from left to right and right to left: or, if not simultaneously, in such irregular and quick succession that he and we become giddy. Joyce's discovery of the literary values of free association had become an *idée fixe*. To enlarge the range of Earwicker's associations, he engaged students to look up for him all the information they could find about earwigs. A sentence about the Liffey is packed with echoes of rivers everywhere. A short passage starting on page 407, after the musical keynote "Overture and beginners please!", contains references to at least sixteen songs (there are very likely others which I have failed to trace), the names of at least five singers, and fifteen other terms connected with stage or concert hall. The fact that Giordano Bruno came from Nola, and so may be called the Nolan, and that there is in Dublin a bookshop called Browne and Nolan, affords Joyce great delight. Mr. Frank O'Connor relates that one evening, when he was Joyce's guest, he touched the frame of a picture on the wall.

"What's this?"

"Cork."

"Yes, I see it's Cork. I was born there. But what's the frame?"

"Cork."

Some time later, in conversation with Yeats, Mr. O'Connor said he thought that in some ways Joyce was mad. Yeats reproved him.

"What you take for madness is the integrity, the necessary idiosyncrasy of the artist."

Mr. O'Connor then told him about the picture and its frame. Yeats sat up straight.

"That is mania. That is insanity."

It is, at any rate, evidence of the fixed idea. The association, the unconscious material, has come through into consciousness



with a life of its own, a process which, repeated indefinitely, can stiffen into psychosis.

Now let us look at one or two more authorities, this time more friendly. Mr. Edmund Wilson, after defending Joyce's use of material outside Earwicker's mind, enquires<sup>1</sup>

.... "Is it not pretty far-fetched to assume that Earwicker's awareness of the life of Swift or the Cretan War is really to be accurately conveyed in terms of the awareness of Joyce, who has acquired a special knowledge of these subjects? Also, what about the reference to the literary life in Paris and to the book itself as *Work in Progress*, which takes us right out of the mind of Earwicker and into the mind of Joyce?"

Of Earwicker himself, Mr. Wilson says:—

.... "there has been too much literature poured into him . . . not merely has he to carry this load of myths; he has also been all wound round by what seems Joyce's growing self-indulgence in an impulse to pure verbal play."<sup>2</sup>

He concludes that, although *Finnegans Wake* "seems for two thirds of its length not really to bring off what it attempts," it has "certain amazing successes" which raise it "to the rank of a great work of literature."<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Harry Levin—what play Joyce would have made with his name<sup>4</sup>—observes:—

"The impatient reader, perpetually admonished to look out for typographical ambushes and to keep listening for surreptitious rhythms, may come to feel that *Finnegans Wake* is a grim business. Actually it is a wonderful game—by no means a private affair, but one in which many may join, each with his own contribution, and the more the merrier . . . While the main themes are never absent from the background, the foreground is always crowded with topical matters. In the middle distance, ordinarily the shadow of interest, the action is shadowy and capricious. Avid for a story, the reader will find little in Joyce's 'meandertale' to reward his pains . . . The richness of Joyce's symbolism helps us to tolerate the realities of the situation. Considered for its vestiges of naturalistic fiction, a night with the Earwickers is weary, flat, and stale."<sup>5</sup>

Mr. T. S. Eliot, broadcasting to India, admitted the book's difficulty.

"To explain how to read it would need a dozen talks; and I don't think that I myself am yet qualified to give them. I will say only that I believe it to be at least as great a work as *Ulysses*, and that is a great book indeed."<sup>6</sup>

And Mr. J. C. Powys, in an essay<sup>7</sup> which gambols round the book like a large and enthusiastic sheepdog, exclaims:—

<sup>1</sup> *The Wound and the Bow*. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>4</sup> Levin—thunderbolt.

<sup>5</sup> *James Joyce*. <sup>6</sup> Reprinted in *The Listener*, Oct. 14, 1943. <sup>7</sup> *Modern Reading*, No. 7.

"For my part I certainly feel that *Finnegans Wake* is as superior to *Ulysses* as Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* is superior to Shelly's *Prometheus Unbound*, or the Hebrew Bible to the Book of Mormon . . . strange as it may sound to use such a word in connection with Joyce, take it all in all the advance upon *Ulysses* made by *Finnegans Wake* is a moral advance."

I do not know whether the reader may feel that the first part of that second sentence at all offsets Mr. Powys's credit as an authority, or how he will feel about his violent rejection of the evidence of Mr. Frank Budgen and of Joyce himself that *Finnegans Wake* is based on dream material:—

"However much the orthodox interpreters of Joyce bring proof, as Frank Budgen does, that Joyce himself declared he based his work on dreams, I still remain totally unconvinced that *Finnegans Wake* deals with anything else than that normal human life with which all great writers deal."

That, of course, begs the whole question of the rôle of the unconscious mind in writing: but Mr. Powys, calling himself "an infatuated admirer and most methodical reader of the book," decides that . . .

"the *extreme difficulty*, though it is not really *obscurity* of Joyce's mature style bars him, and *always will bar him*, from a place among the very first rank of writers in our language,"

and then, contradicting himself, hits the nail a ringing blow on the head:

"I hold the view that the really great things in writers of genius and the things that will influence posterity are *not* the things which are pre-meditated and intended, but the things that rise up from the depths of the writer's unique soul, and are diffused through his work."

In other words, the things that rise from his unconscious.

*Finnegans Wake*, to my mind, labours under five main defects:—

1. The two processes, from association to object, from object to association, seldom harmonise, and often create serious confusion.

2. The method depends, not on selection, but on accretion. It would be idiotic to say that Joyce did not select, but his *method* is not selective. Where different drafts of his work have been published, the revisions tend to get longer and more elaborate.

3. Whereas dream material is ninety-nine per cent. visual—there is little sound in most people's dreams, and next to no

smell or touch—*Finnegans Wake* is not visual. It is almost all addressed to the ear.

4. In his effort to cheat time and guard against the changing sense of words, in his endeavour to isolate meaning, Joyce has run a risk of locking it away in cold storage.

5. For the greater part of its length, it is a book written to a theory.

I am not bothered when Earwicker's mind commingles with Joyce's or anyone else's in a book wherein the destiny of the river is to "mingle with the ocean." Earwicker asleep is universal man, and can overhear and share in Joyce's jibes at Joyce as Shem the Penman, or in any man's mind at any time. Nor does my flesh creep at Mr. MacCarthy's picture of the unconscious. Once it can be integrated with consciousness, I look on balanced life as a harmony between the two. That one should not get some of the main clues to the book's meaning till near its end I can also accept, for the book is by its nature circular, or static, not laid out in a straight line in time. Reading it is like rising in a balloon and watching the ground gradually take form and shape and its features assume relationship to each other, as in a map.

But the five defects above seem to me serious. To admit them is by no means to disparage the book as a whole. The novels of Dickens gape and glare with faults, yet they are indisputably works of genius. The last scene of *Twelfth Night*, a perfunctory jumble of coincidences and inadequacies—

"Pursue him and entreat him to a peace . . ."

—and this after Malvolio's exit, humiliated, raging, has stopped the play—in no way detracts from the loveliest comedy in the language. The lyric harmonies of the fifth act of *The Merchant of Venice* do not resolve the discords of the trial scene, yet who would wish either away? We must face, as Mr. Powys points out, the possibility that *Finnegans Wake* succeeds in spite of its programme. That it achieves tremendous things grows clearer the more one reads it; long after the game of spotting significances has lost its early thrill. In any case, success or failure, it must remain a most brilliant and formidable feat of literary pioneering, to which all future artists in words must be in debt, if only because it shows some things to be impossible.



[illegible]

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

SEAN O'FAOLAIN: Born Cork, 1900. Began career as a teacher and University lecturer. Two volumes of short stories published by Jonathan Cape. Also written novels, biographies, a play, and verse-translations from the Old Irish. Is a founder member of the Irish Academy of Letters.

JAMES STEPHENS: An acknowledged master of words as novelist, poet, critic, broadcaster, teller of tales, and talker. One of the leading figures of the Irish Literary Renaissance.

LOUIS MACNEICE: Born Belfast, 1907. Famous as poet and also has made a reputation as a critic, translator, and writer of plays for broadcasting. Now works with the B.B.C.

FRANK O'CONNOR: Born Cork, 1905. Gained a reputation as a translator of Gaelic poetry and now also recognised as a master of the short story. Was a director of the Abbey Theatre until 1939, when he resigned.

SEAN JENNETT: Born 1912. Lives in England where he is production director of the Grey Walls Press and the Falcon Press. Has had two collections of poems published by Faber and Faber and is at present writing a book about typography, on which he is an expert.

TERESA DEEVY: Born in Waterford, now living in Dublin. One of Ireland's great playwrights, her plays have been produced in Ireland, Great Britain, and the U.S.A. and broadcast in Ireland and England. *Katie Roche* was chosen as one of the best plays of 1935-36.

ROBERT FARREN: Born Dublin, 1909. Took Master's Degree in Scholastic Philosophy, National University of Ireland. A Director of the Abbey Theatre since 1940 and co-founder with Austin Clarke of the Dublin Verse-Speaking Society. Has written many books of verse and one volume of Gaelic short

## IRISH WRITING

st stories, and has in preparation *Towards An Appreciation Of Poetry* to be published by the Metropolitan Press. Is Deputy Director of Radio Eireann.

**LIAM O'FLAHERTY**: Born on the Aran Islands, 1896. Various jobs took him all over the world. Has written short stories and many novels. Latest, *Land*, published this year by Victor Gollancz.

**PATRICK KAVANAGH**: One of Ireland's leading younger poets; his long poem, *The Great Hunger*, was widely acclaimed. Is on the staff of a Dublin weekly.

**BILL NAUGHTON**: Born Co. Mayo, 1910, of peasant stock. Family moved to Lancashire when he was a child. Worked in a cotton factory and at many other jobs, finally settling down to heavy-lorry driving. Now lives as a solitary and believes that is the one way for a writer. Has published short stories and two novels.

**MYLES na gCOPALEEN**: Has written a novel, plays, and also a humorous book in Gaelic. Writes a column in the *Irish Times*; its mixture of wit, satire, and scholarship has made his name almost a household word in Ireland.

**LORD DUNSANY**: Born 1878. Educated at Eton. Has written many novels, plays and short stories. Fox-hunting, big-game hunting, and shooting are among his interests.

**E. OE. SOMERVILLE** and **MARTIN ROSS**: Dr. Somerville was educated at her home in Co. Cork and studied art in London and Paris. Collaborated with her cousin, Martin Ross, in all her literary work. Since the death of Martin Ross, Dr. Somerville has continued to write and every book still bears the name of both authors.

**VIVIAN MERCIER**: Born Dublin, 1919. Was Scholar of Trinity College, Dublin, where he took the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy. Special award in AE Memorial Competition, 1945, for his study of Realism in Anglo-Irish Fiction, 1916-1940. At present living in the U.S.A.

**L. A. G. STRONG**: Born Plymouth, 1896, of predominantly Irish parentage. Spent regular intervals of his youth near Dublin. Has written many books, including novels, short stories, and verse. Is a well-known broadcaster and an expert on dialects.